

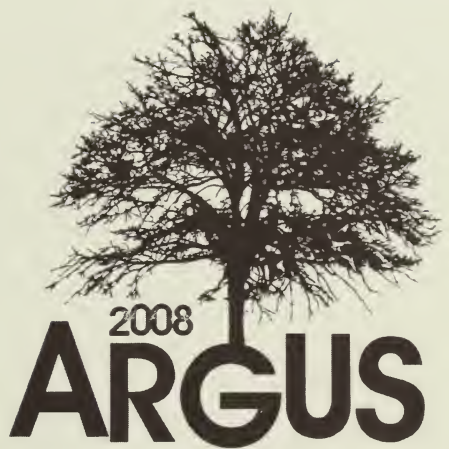


# ARCUS



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Northwestern State University's  
Annual Literary and Art Publication

## **EDITORIAL STAFF**

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**LARRIE KING**

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**KATIE MAGANA**

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**BLADE MARCANTEL**

Editorial Board

**MARLINDA PRUDEN**

Editorial Board

**MARY BETH WIDHALM**

Editorial Board

# WITH GRATITUDE

We want to begin by thanking everyone who submitted this year. Whether or not your names appear in this book, you are the lifeblood of the Argus and without your contributions, we could not continue to provide Northwestern with a literary magazine. We are privileged to showcase your lives, your writing, and your art.

We owe a huge depth of gratitude to Dr. Julie Kane who has supported the Argus for many years and has provided her talent, enthusiasm, and her guidance to this staff and each staff before me.

We would also like to thank Dr. Abney and the Department of Language and Communication and Dr. Chandler and the Department of Fine and Graphic Arts. We appreciate their consistent support and encouragement.

To our judges for offering their time and their perspectives; Gary Hardamon for lending his talent and time every year; Bobbie Jackson, Peggy Cedars, and Ada Hippler for helping us get through the sticky stuff and handing out the office key ten thousand times.

To those professors, Dr. Colavito and Dr. Pritts, who have kept close ties to the Argus each year and have aided in any way necessary to keep the magazine afloat.

And to everyone who reads this, thank you for picking up the Argus and taking an interest in the hard work and creative talent of your fellow students at Northwestern State University.



## ANDI MCKAY

When Larrie presented his theme ideas to the staff, there was unanimous excitement over this, our nameless Argus. The design was unique and, I admit, I thought: the untitled thing worked for Led Zeppelin, why not us?

The book has a mystery to it, being untitled. In many cultures a person does not receive their true name until they have come into some sort of being. This book is a reflection of the time just before that name is given (a little cheesy, I know). This year's Argus is not about being, it is about becoming.

The works in this year's Argus reflect that sense of moving toward something, or moving away from something else. Movement, that is what best describes it. Each piece is moving and growing into some direction, and becoming a renewed idea of self, life, and the world around.

I could not have grown as an editor without the help of many people: Larrie, for his brilliant insight and dedication to the Argus; Chandler, for tirelessly staying beside me to finish the Argus and caring so much about releasing a well-done magazine; Savanna, for taking on the extra work and helping with the contest coordination; Corey, Teranda, Katie, Blade, Marli, and Mary Beth for all of their time and effort spent to make this magazine.

I'd also like to thank the past editors who gave me advice and support. Angelin Borsics, whom I had the pleasure of meeting in New York City, and who graciously took time from her busy schedule to help us out; Monica Gremillion, who offered her telephone number and advice when I got stuck; April Dickson-Braun, who sat around endless hours discussing the Argus, offering help, and who gave me the extra push I needed to apply for this position.

## O. CHANDLER CROOK

I fell in love with Argus years ago when Angelin Adams was the editor. She told me to submit some of my work, but I was nervous and unsure. A few years later, Monica Gremillion, a close friend of mine, became the editor and I abandoned all nervousness. I was given the opportunity to be the illustrator of that edition, and have submitted much of my work to Argus since. Argus has given me the opportunity to showcase my work, and I am glad that as assistant editor, I am now given the opportunity to showcase works of students gifted in poetry, art, photography, fiction, and nonfiction. Andi, the staff, and I have tirelessly read hundreds of submissions, and I believe the work published in this edition displays the talent of these individuals.

I take great pride in this year's edition. I not only take pride in the content, but also the design and theme. No matter who might be flipping through this year's edition, they will be able to connect with this year's theme, growth. The tree obviously symbolizes growth, but Andi and I also wanted to arrange the poetry to fit the theme as well. We believe that the arrangement of the pieces is cohesive, and works well with the theme.

I hate that this is my last year working with Argus, but as most great things in life, it has to end at some point. I am grateful to Angelin for introducing me to the Argus, and Monica for pushing me to submit. Also, a big thank you goes out to Andi. Thanks for choosing me to be your assistant editor and putting up with my craziness. I know all of your blood, sweat, and tin (as Sharon Olds might say) will pay off. Finally, I'd like to say thank you to Dr. Kane. You have been my mentor, and your zeal for the arts has driven me to pursue the passion I have for writing.

# FROM THE DESIGN EDITOR

LARRIE KING

Growth is a process of moving from one state to another. Without growth, we fail to realize our ultimate human potential. When I approached the design of this Argus, I kept that in mind. Last year, we concentrated on the brokenness we often experience. That sense of damage was reflected throughout the artwork and design aspects of the book. This year we acknowledge the growth that can occur once you break the soil.

I used plants, and more specifically trees, as a metaphor for humanity. We start small, we grow, and though branches may fall throughout our lives, we end up changing a lot more around us than we could ever know. I wanted this book to be open, fresh, and inviting. The lack of a title, aside from “Argus” allows the viewer to interpret the mood of this book in the manner that best relates to him or her.

I am hopeful that I have helped create two books that truly reflect a campus populated with people who have real lives, hardships, dreams, and people that embrace growth.

I would like to thank Andi and the entire Argus staff, who motivated me to no end when I presented to them (a bit less than eloquently) my ideas. I would like to thank those designers for the Argus before me, who made me challenge myself. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge Northwestern State University of Natchitoches. This publication has been created for decades now, and I am proud to be a part of a university that gives us this opportunity.



## ART

**Michael Yankowski** has been a professor of art at Northwestern State University for twenty-one years. He teaches Photography, Graphic Communication, and Design. He was a professional photographer, graphic designer, and high school art teacher before he decided to join the staff at NSU. He exhibits nationally and is represented in a gallery in New Orleans.

**Valerie Powell** is an assistant professor in the Department of Fine and Graphic Arts at Northwestern State University, LA.

## PHOTOGRAPHY

**Sonny Carter** has been a photographer for news media, editorial, and commercial photography since 1960. He is currently published in *Louisiana Life Magazine* and on the website [www.sonc.com](http://www.sonc.com).

Our second photography judge wishes to remain anonymous.

**Michael Yankowski**

## POETRY

**Amanda Cagle**, a native of Louisiana, received her Ph.D. in English from the University of Connecticut. Her fiction and poetry have appeared in journals such as *The Ontario Review*, *The Connecticut Review*, *Revista Atenea*, *The Essay Connection*, and *The Louisiana Review*. She has been the recipient of both the Wallace Stevens Poetry Prize and the Edwin Way Teale Nature Writing Award. Currently, she is at work on a novel.

**Dr. J. Rocky Colavito** is a professor of English in the Department of Language and Communication at Northwestern State University, LA.

**Krista Jenkins** received a B.A. in English Literature as well as an M.A. in Writing and Linguistics from Northwestern State University. An avid creative writer and poet, she eagerly shares her passion for writing with her students while teaching composition courses in Northwestern's Department of Language and Communication.

## FICTION

**Dr. James (Andy) Crank** attended Washington University in St. Louis before receiving his M.A. and Ph.D. at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, where he specialized in American, Southern, and African American literature. Much of his publications center on Tennessee poet/novelist James Agee -- including an edited edition of the author's short fiction, which is due to be published by the University of Tennessee Press in 2010.

### Amanda Cagle

**Angelin Adams Borsics** is an NSU alumna, served as Editor-in-Chief of the Argus for the 2004 and 2005 issues, and graduated in 2006 with a graduate degree in English Writing and Linguistics. She currently works at The Wylie Agency, a literary agency in Manhattan, negotiating contracts and rights for writers.

## NONFICTION

**Nahla Beier** was born in Jerusalem, and has lived in Beirut, Lebanon, and various American cities. She has a Ph.D. in English Renaissance Literature from the University of Virginia and teaches English at a residential school for gifted students. Her publications include: "One More River to Cross," in *Children of Israel, Children of Palestine: Our Own True Stories*, and "Veronica's Veil," in *Passages North*.

### Angelin Adams Borsics

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# ART

## FIRST PLACE:

Amanda Roe, "Girl With Mask"

## SECOND PLACE:

Amanda Roe, "The City"

## THIRD PLACE:

Rebecca Edwards, "Harvest"

# PHOTOGRAPHY

## FIRST PLACE:

Sarah Hunt, "My Flori"

## SECOND PLACE:

Mary Manno, "Stroll Down The Hall"

## THIRD PLACE:

Danielle Kenny, "Simplacid"

# ARGUS 2008 WINNERS

# POETRY

## FIRST PLACE:

Michael Wendel, "Geography"

## SECOND PLACE:

Keisha Johnson, "Neo Slave Owner"

## THIRD PLACE:

Randall Frederick, "Shall We Dance?"

# FICTION

## FIRST PLACE:

Dane Clayton, "The Whole Entire Story"

## SECOND PLACE:

Matt Guido, "Lazarus Day"

## THIRD PLACE:

Kera Simon, "More Waiting"

# NONFICTION

## FIRST PLACE:

Robert Lane, "Among Strange Brethren"

## SECOND PLACE:

Robert Lane, "Incident On The Campti Cutoff"

## THIRD PLACE:

Rebecca Edwards, "Not Strictly Made Of Stone"



## PANTOUM TO THE GODDESS

CHRIS CALLAHAN

Maidens, Mothers, Crones.  
Sitting patiently in disguise,  
Cast your knuckle bones!  
Waiting for a new season to rise.  
Sitting patiently in disguise,  
Watching the world of straw men turn round,  
Waiting for a new season to rise,  
Watching the men of clay return to the  
ground.  
Watching the world of straw men turn round,  
Seeking only the greater good,  
Watching the men of clay return to the  
ground,  
Cloistered away in a green wood.  
Seeking only the greater good,  
Alone in Sacred Solitude she toils,  
Cloistered away in a green wood,  
Watching the men fight over the war's spoils.  
Alone in Sacred Solitude she toils,  
Cast your knuckle bones!  
Watching the men fight over war's spoils,  
Maidens, Mothers, Crones.

**I WROTE A GOOD BREAKFAST** VALERIE FOLEY  
(An Ode to Nikki Giovanni's "I Wrote a Good Omelet")

I wrote a good breakfast...and ate a hot essay  
after loving you

I wrote in my fingernails...and polished my diary  
after loving you

I combed my car...and drove my hair to class...  
on a Saturday  
after loving you

I dialed my radio...and listened to your phone number...  
twice  
after loving you

I drank my email...and checked my wine...  
still tipsy with lust in mind  
after making love to you.



The early morning haze hangs heavy  
 Above row upon row of tall, green plants  
 With tomatoes hanging, waiting and ready  
 To be plucked by the small, eager hands.

Above row upon row of tall, green plants,  
 The sun is just rising, its light subdued.  
 Thick humidity tickles the skin like ants,  
 Expanse of lawn covered by a film of dew.

The sun is just rising, its light subdued.  
 A trio of children with their mother in tow,  
 Clutching red and green baskets to store their loot  
 They race to the garden and disappear amidst rows.

Scampering about the garden in the growing heat,  
 Three young bandits pluck the ripe red fruits.  
 Laughing, they stop and eat one as a treat  
 Faces and plump fingers become sticky with juice.

Three young bandits pluck the ripe red fruits  
 Then run to Dad for a hug before he leaves for the day  
 And to add to his lunchbox what their forage  
     produced.  
 Tomorrow they will repeat their enchanting foray.

With tomatoes hanging, waiting, and ready  
 To be gathered and collected like treasure.  
 The early morning haze hangs heavy  
 And envelops the figures in the languorous weather.

## PAJAMA CLAD BANDITS





I'd stay asleep longer  
 but I know my sheets won't embrace you forever  
 The frost has fallen  
 and the wind whistles for you to return  
 I slide you closer  
 to where your lips will graze mine  
 I want so much for this to be the moment

when everything is okay  
 I want to give you that moment  
 Outside I hear the wind again  
 She hums her lullaby  
*Close your eyes*  
*Go to sleep*  
*No one knows*  
*The secret you keep*  
*Live your dream*  
*Unaware it's a lie*  
*Try to let all time pass by*

In a flash, she returns me to the fields  
 I walk around the bales of hay  
 and over the cow pies  
 and under the dogwood trees  
 I walk until I can't see home anymore  
 Then finally veiled beneath the shade of my favorite  
 tree  
 I tell the cows my secrets  
 on pieces of stationery  
 that I leave balled up in the grass  
 I tell them about you

I'd stay asleep longer  
 but I feel your curves sliding away from my fingers

Soon you will be leaving me  
 but I manage to catch the scent  
 of tiger lilies lingering in a wisp of your hair  
 I covet more than a moment  
 but I realize that you belong to the wind  
 and I must return to the fields

# NOT STRICTLY MADE OF STONE

REBECCA EDWARDS

The most self-destructive thing that we do as people is to allow ourselves to love someone who does not deserve it. However, we are usually blinded by that love and by our own stupidity--when you know this person does not deserve your emotional discharge, I assure you, it feels much worse. Yet every time that person sucks you into their life, like some aching vortex. My aching vortex happens to be my mother, and I the future victim of many years in therapy.

If pawn shops gave money for children, my mother would have put me in hock a long time ago. When she's straight and clean, oh how she loves me! Oh how sorry she was for whatever she did the last time she was high! But when she needs a hit and when she's loaded...she'd sell her own soul, or those of her children, to the devil for just one more trip.

Neil Young's lyrics that say "Every junkie is like the setting sun," and that old joke about "How do you know a junkie is lying? Her lips are moving," ring true to me. Approaching her fiftieth birthday, my mother's ideal gift would be a goody bag of pills and a couple of rocks to smoke at her leisure.

With that necessary forward stated, I would also like to add that this story is merely me sharing an experience with you, in hopes of someone relating to it in some way. I am not a whiner. I also love my mother very much. "I'm going to call Gene, and tell him to send me some more money," my mother tells me.

"Mama," I answer, "if you call him for more money, then he'll know you're buying drugs and he'll

beat the shit out of you when you go back to him.”

Given the gifted liar she has ultimately become, I see the plan forming in her head. “I’ll just tell Gene that you have to go to the gynecologist, and that I need money to pay for it!” she determines.

I see her sitting on the bed, and can’t help but feel sorry for her. She’s coming down from her last high and I can see how hard she is crashing. She needs a hit really badly. Her dirty blonde hair is lank and smells like smoke. The baggy T-shirt she’s wearing is starting to show the evidence of her profuse sweating. “Goddamn” is used every other word and she’s so nervous that I’m surprised that there aren’t sparks forming. It’s a tragedy to feel pity for your parent.

Between her fast and shallow breaths she begins to beg. “Becky, please give me a ride to score, please, for your mother?” Before I even begin to rebuke her, or dispute the posed favor, she knows that she owns me. She knows what I’ll do even before I do.

“Are you crazy? It’s like 12 a.m. in the morning. I’m not going to drive in the quarters so you can buy drugs...,” I begin. “Everyone knows my car in town and Dad would kill me!” I see the urgency in her beautiful yet lined face. I see the physical pain that the comedown is causing her. I am defeated.

As I pull up to the rundown shack where her drug dealer resides, I am filled with anxiety about being seen by someone I go to high school with, or being pulled over by the cops. Then, as I’m about to kill the engine, a man appears beside my mother’s passenger window. She rolls it down.

“Hey, Dicey baby, I ain’t seen you in a long got-damn time!” the man exclaims. He then sticks his head through the car door and kisses my mother. She lets him in the car and I am instructed to drive. While they are catching up I glance at him in the rearview mirror. He’s got maybe 3 or 4 good teeth and is around my mother’s age or older. His skin is so black that the whites of his eyes are vivid and his skin looks like it’s carved from wood. Sweat is glistening on his skinny face. His Hanes T-shirt is light purple with a pocket on the breast. It’s got multiple holes, and grease and sweat stains. His blue jeans match his overall appearance and he smells strongly of baby powder (and not in a clean way). I’m given directions by Mr. Dealer and am instructed to drive on to another house,

being as his own stock is dry.

What in reality is 15 minutes feels like a year. After my mother purchases about 50 bucks worth of crack, I am finally allowed to head toward taking her home.

She can't wait for me to drop her off before she gets high, so she starts to load up her pipe in my car. She takes the glass tube out of her purse and puts fresh wire in the end. She breaks a rock in half and sticks it in the end with the wire. She tucks away the remaining half in her little plastic baggie. (Instead of teaching me moral life lessons, my mother taught me to always put my drugs in plastic, not paper, bags. Paper erodes your drugs.)

She scrunches down low in the seat and puts the pipe to her lips. The pipe is tilted slightly upward, so that she can get the rock melted. Her lips do an automatic sucking/huffing thing and her eyes go slightly crossed as she holds the lighter up to the opposite end of the pipe.

After the preliminaries, she then takes an enormous hit. I feel myself breathing the smoke in deeply. My skin begins to crawl and my throat tingles--I want a hit. Mom introduced me to crack when I was about 15 or 16, so I actually did know what I was missing. She taught me to hold the smoke in for as long as I could, and then to let it out. As a matter of fact, she taught me everything. I swore the last time we got high together that it would be the last time for me, and I meant it. I would not be her in 30 years, teaching my hypothetical daughter to smoke or inject drugs.

All the same, seeing her get the rock ready and tasting her smoke in my mouth made my brain fuzzy. While holding in her smoke, she says in a strained voice, "You wanna hit this, baby?" I lit my cigarette in response--as badly as I wanted to take her up on her offer, disappointing myself would be worse.

She inhales so much smoke it is like she's been holding her breath all this time, and only now can she breathe in this holy breath of life. She holds it in for as long as possible, then exhales a massive plume out her window. I can sense her body starting to relax, but it doesn't last long. After a couple more hard hits and that half almost gone, she becomes extremely paranoid, and begins looking for cops hiding on



the side of the road. "Mama, stop being so fucking paranoid, you're freaking me out. We're almost home, so just relax."

"Becky, you've never been to jail, and I ain't ready to go back, so shut the hell up and just drive the speed limit."

Determined as she is that we will be pulled over, she puts the plastic baggie of drugs down her panties and hands me the pipe. In a forceful and hurried gesture she shoves it in my hand. "Put this in your bra," she says.

I can still feel the glass is scorching hot from her lighter. "There is nobody around, and I'm not hiding that on me," I yell, my patience wearing thin. I can tell that she is starting to get angry.

"If I were wearing a bra I would put it in mine, but I'm not!" She attempts to hide the pipe down her panties along with the drugs.

I know, pulling away from the place that she is staying, that she would be up all night hiding and re-hiding her drugs compulsively between hits. Tomorrow, when all the rocks have been smoked, she will go to the pawn shop, where they know her by her first name. She'll get money (from her dead mother's jewelry), persuade someone to take her to score, and the cycle repeats itself.

At least my mother isn't boring, and I am grateful for all the bad in my life so that I will cherish the good. After 21 years of my mother being clean, going back to drugs, and clean, and drugs, like everything else you are faced with.... you learn to adapt and to deal. I believe God knew to make me a strong person so that I would be able to handle the life that He would give me, because He doesn't give us more than we can bear. Instead of spending a lifetime resenting my mother, I became an artist (and occasional writer) instead. Through her neglect and selfishness, she unknowingly gave me the gift of creativity.







## NEO SLAVE OWNER KEISHA JOHNSON

Am I nothing  
but the fiction  
of other people?  
What they make out  
to be real  
is what I make myself  
out to be. I am lost  
in a vacuum  
of words and phrases  
without meaning.  
I am totally not.  
I am a jigsaw puzzle  
of lies.  
Glued, framed, and hung  
up in the back hall.  
Hidden for my insincerity  
that I truly believed in;  
Shammed.

I am not an original.  
But a fake  
molded  
by deceiving hands  
to model something greater.

I am built  
of industrial dreams.  
Manufactured ideas.  
And I hoped for higher things.  
But I am too easily broken  
to be real.  
Too heavily fallen  
like a boulder.  
Shattered on the floor  
like a looking glass  
instead of a diamond.  
Trying to mirror  
the better actions;  
taken with better faith  
with better ideas.  
But I am only  
a carnival distortion.  
I'm no better  
than what I was created from.  
No better than the phony words  
and false faces  
and empty hugs  
and destitute kisses.  
I am a creature of society.

SUNDAY DRIVE  
MARY BETH WIDHALM

The car door crashed closed,  
suede seat sagging,  
and she clicked the key clockwise  
but the damned start was dragging.

She began to shake the shifter  
to restart a well-rehearsed routine--  
tap gas tap gas tap break and turn--  
the erratic engine emits a scream.

She thrashes through thick streets,  
her grill grinding gravel,  
she mauls ambivalent mailboxes  
(she's terrified to travel).

White knuckles whirl the wheel and,  
with logic lost along the way,  
the car careens, complete threesixties  
like a beautiful baroque ballet.





## GEOGRAPHY MICHAEL WENDEL

I drew a map of Hawaii on her stomach,  
rolling into a Jim Beam Dream.  
The first blizzard in state history.  
Deep colorful sleep,  
cut short by an everlasting snore.  
So I slinked into my clothes trying not to wake the whore,  
who by some intoxicating mishap  
I asked to dance because she looked like that chick  
from that TV show I can't remember.  
And she ended up with my geography lesson  
strewn upon her belly.  
Tasting the remnants of the mixture of  
stale bud light, bacardi, menthols  
and wintergreen skoal from only hours ago.  
Throwing on my boots donning my coat,  
running my hands through the coarse hair  
covering my face and head.  
Slinking out the door pulling on my stocking cap.  
Looking at my watch, the sun yet to rise.  
The way home looking strangely eerie,  
like that strange boat ride those kids took  
with Willy Wonka down that chocolate moat.  
The street lights glowing like the aurora borealis,  
dome like over the icy, snow-covered streets.  
Walking in a straight line not an option, as gravity suddenly  
pulls  
my body crashing into the brick paved streets.



Blacking out for only an eternity, suddenly jerking awake  
a cold wet tongue across my face.  
Panting breath smelling like my aunt Helen's,  
(who looked like the vulture guys in the dark crystal)  
lapping the multicolored snow off of my frozen, blue face,  
a piss-colored mix bitch looking at me with the same  
droopy,  
needy look that ol' whats'er name had to her.  
I wonder if she would be my best friend?  
Scraping myself off of the cold hard bricks,  
bending my glasses into a wearable shape,  
dragging myself down the lonely street  
an homage to Romero.

the last night that we should have said goodbye,  
in the car windows sliding idly, mildly, down; outside  
a funeral procession lay its mark and lay its dead  
as a marker of this night: the dead who whisper in your radio,  
the universe spiraling between your car seat and mine,  
your hands like skeletons, your breath like juniper, mint  
mind, my mind like a coaster

i remind you of a poem that you once read,  
but you've slipped away again;  
you could be on the other side of the world,  
you could be one hundred years dead by now,  
you could have slept on bed sheets like mine,  
like i did, that summer, so afraid to go under,  
seeking out hindu elephants on west virginia hills  
seeking out anything the opposite of.

the dim lights of the grieving pass by, it's  
no irony i accidentally ended up in the procession,  
no irony we ended up like this, staring out car windows,  
like the dead watching each other from the mausoleum,  
the funeral is for you. the funeral is  
for the trees tonight, the wind whipping  
rhythms against both of our car seats  
down, one, down, one, down, one  
breathes the whimpering singer in  
your stereo, tearing down universes;  
now, your hands are bones, now,  
the ride is through, i  
wait dizzy, without you.

## COASTER ANDI MCKAY







**UNTITLED**  
COREY BREITLING

# PROZAC ISN'T THE ANSWER BUT HAVE YOU TRIED VIVACTIL?

KEISHA JOHNSON

Sometimes I would kill  
to walk around like a zombie.  
To live like a phantom  
inside my body.  
Glide through quiet  
streets. No one can touch me,  
nothing can hurt me.  
I want to be a million miles away  
when you look into my eyes.  
What would I give to smoke  
my soul up to fair-weathered skies.  
And how I would give anything to forget  
who I was supposed to be.  
Lose my mind to something  
no one else can find.  
Already I feel  
my body relax,  
my breathing cut to half,  
my lids becoming lazy.  
My heart,  
still beating  
still working  
to escape.



fragile follicles whippoorwilling in the wind  
as I shake out the towel  
and we begin again  
it's not how I see it, that's what I tell myself  
shake out the towel  
clean up the sink  
it's not how I see it, that's what I tell myself  
as I avoid every mirror  
put away the clippers, clean up the sink  
say goodbye to that time of discontent  
avoid the mirror, avoid that mirror, whatever you  
do,  
avoid that damned mirror  
for that costumed clown is out of season  
say goodbye to the time of discontent  
though it lives on in pictures and letters  
and that costumed clown was so out of season  
so I put on a new mask and entertain you  
I live on in pictures and letters  
and regret the present more than what came be-  
fore  
standing here, reading my lines verbatim  
wearing a mask to entertain you  
regretting the present before  
it happens  
so I make a cut or two, and it's too late to turn  
back  
I can't be what I am  
it's too late, and it happens  
avoiding mirrors and that face that stares back  
missing what came before  
having to shake out the towel  
reincarnated with the same face that stares back  
it's not how I see it, I tell myself as I begin again  
missing what came before  
fragile follicles whippoorwilling in the wind



# INCIDENT ON THE CAMPTI CUTOFF

ROBERT LANE

There are times in your life when, in a sudden rush of randomness, the ordinary departs and the dangerous, the challenging, or even the totally absurd will momentarily rearrange your carefully planned life just to show you that you are not really in charge after all. Such an event occurred in the year 2000 on the pulpwood highway between Campti and the Red River Bridge, at the Millers Farm Road Crossing. With distance and time, I smile about it now, realizing that had the event actually killed me, I would not only be famous but proverbial because of the comic way I met my fate. The kids from Lakeview would have erected one of those highway crosses painted dark Lakeview green and they would snicker each time they drove by at how I had taken one for the school.

Fridays in the fall last all day and late into the night. There is nothing quite like a high school district football game in your home stadium on a crisp November night, when the lights come on early, and the faithful show up in their warm

hunting clothes to ring cowbells when the boys run out. I'm there, you see. I'm the voice that echoes off the trees. I am only the second public address announcer in school history, and the first guy only did it for a year. Lakeview was so new to football that the sweet little stadium did not even have a name. From me calling it Gator Land, the stadium was named. No one but me remembers silly details like this, but I can smile about the unusual impact that I have had there. In 2000, I had been there for seven seasons. That year, we had a good campaign and the very last game would determine if we made it to the playoffs for only the second time in the history of the school. To make the scene even better, we had to beat our archrival the Red River Bulldogs, our across the parish line cousins, to qualify to go to the playoffs as a wild card. The Bulldogs were undefeated and untied and we would host them for our Senior Night.

To say the kids were up for the game is to use rather severe understatement. Spontaneous cheers began in classrooms even before lunch. The lunch room was a riot of noise, without fighting; all hearts and all voices were on the very same idea--beat the bulldogs. Afternoon classes were a waste of time and, by pep rally time, the din of cheers from the stands made the cheerleaders sound like so many mimes. It was like one giant heart beating inside as the building struggled to contain it. It was going to be a day to remember, at least until the next time we played our cross the line cousins.

Senior Night, I have always maintained, is really for the parents. They get introduced with their seniors and get to relish in their child's accomplishments as the student athlete takes the applause from the crowd for the last time at home. Though I did not invent Senior Night at Lakeview, I have been in charge of it since the first year we had it. Since I am also the English III teacher when I am not announcing ball games, I write my own scripts for Senior Night and Homecoming and also announce half time shows. Don't the band kids and



dance line deserve the zippy hyperbole of a real introduction? Senior Night 2000 was as cold as a well digger's butt. We were ready to beat the bulldogs.

Now I need to tell you a secret. I hate pep rallies. Announcing at a pep rally is exhausting, hot, and fruitless. After trying to maintain some semblance of order for six periods, then to have to run that on its head and help whip everyone up strikes me as just silly. On games like Senior Night there is no use to announce-- it's too loud even for the microphone. They give me a monster headache and I have to pretend I'm really enjoying myself. Announcing the seniors at the pep rally that fateful year was like watching crusaders looting Jerusalem. My head was as big as a pumpkin afterwards. It had been a three Aleve kind of day. I wanted to feel much better for the presentation at the game.

As much as I hate pep rallies, I love working in the press box. Press box work takes advantage of one of my few real talents, being able to talk and listen at the same time. In the tiny press box in Gator Land, we sit as tightly as one might in a World War I vintage submarine. I have the middle seat. To my right is the spotter who helps me quickly call who made the play. This person is more valuable than gold. On my left are two statisticians, one for our offense and the other for our defense. On either side of this line of people sits a coach, one of ours and one of theirs on headsets talking to the sidelines. Over my right shoulder is the guy from the paper. On the far left end is whatever radio station shows up. As soon as pre-game is over and the teams line up to kick, everyone goes to work in the press box talking as loud and fast as they can. Cords and cables run everywhere on the floor. The place sounds like we are trading orange juice futures. It is the most fun I have had on a Friday night since I was a player. From out of the din of voices and the crackle of electrical equipment, we help Lakeview football put on one hell of a show. I do it from the best seat in the house. This was the type of night that I anticipated that year, in 2000, but the random chaos vortex had slightly different plans.

I was a headache walking on two long legs as I left the

back door of Lakeview High School after the pep rally had been turned out on the bus ramp. I had last minute check-off drill to finish making sure everything for Senior Night introductions was ready before I left for the afternoon, hopefully to sit somewhere in a quiet room. The field painters were still hard at it.

“Coach Lane, would you mind going to get the programs today?” whined the new cheerleader sponsor, looking up from a large can of green paint. She had her hair in pigtails and paint all over her overalls. She looked about 16. Jeans day will do that for a young teacher. “I look a mess.” I just kind of looked at my feet. “OK, but remember you said you looked a mess, not me.” Damn, I had to drive clear to Impressions by Duni-gan to pick up the program that had the Senior Night insert that we had designed during publications two weeks before. If I was going to be a full service kind of guy, I guessed then I’d even go pick up the programs. Stepping out of my usual routine may have been what disturbed the universe that day. If it did, I hold no ill will against the cheerleader sponsor who the very next year married some bigwig in the CP-Tel family and retired from teaching at age 26.

The Campti Cutoff, or state highway 486, runs from its junction with Highway 71 in hypotenuse fashion through the countryside to Campti, cutting the corner so one does not have to take 71 all the way into Clarence before turning left to arrive in Campti on the other side of town. It is driven primarily by log trucks, 18 wheelers, the occasional hay bailer, and any local resident with a sturdy enough vehicle and constitution to risk his life doing so. Though the posted limit is 45, the real speed limit is more like 60. Even though it is stated nowhere in the vehicle code, log trucks absolutely have the right of way. There are 13 crosses where someone has lost their life in a vehicle accident that dot the Cutoff from where I turn onto it from Highway 71, to where I fork right onto Highway 9 just below Lakeview. The Cutoff on a bad day resembles a Mad Max film. You just have to hope for the best.

I left the school at about 3:20 PM, needing to make it to Impressions before it closed. The Cutoff was crowded with traffic, all of it moving too fast and too close together. I was driving, rather proudly, the new-to-us Windstar that we had

bought about two months before as a program vehicle. It still had the new car smell. I had the oldies channel on the radio and “Working on the chain gang” was blaring out of my new speakers when I noticed something really odd coming in the opposite direction. There was a short bed pickup, red and bondo colored, laboring under the load of several major appliances. It appeared that the driver had stacked them up very high on top of each other. It was at that moment that the magic happened. As we came close enough to each other for me to notice that he had indeed stacked a stove on top of a deep freeze, I said aloud, “There’s no rope around that stove.”

Even now, I am not sure that me saying that did not cause the stove to fall. Just as I finished that statement, the truck lurched as if it had braked suddenly or shifted gears, then spun its tires and sped up. This motion caused the stove to drop off to the right. It fell in my lane, just missing the truck in front of me, and began rolling toward me. I was going about 62 miles per hour when the stove fell off the truck. As odd as this sounds, things seemed to go very slowly from that point until the impact. I glanced at the left lane. A log truck was coming on at speed. That would have meant death. I looked to the right, but the shoulder had dropped away about eight or ten feet in a gentle hill that ended in Papa Miller’s farm. I did not want to roll the van. I literally stood on the brake.

For the first time in my life, I shouted at God, “Jesus, stop my van!” I was still sort of standing up when I struck the rolling stove. The sound was like hearing a tin roof being ripped off a house by a hurricane. The impact slammed my head and neck against the roof and the air bag hit me in the stomach and abdomen. I noted that it smelled like gunpowder and thought grimly that it would have killed my young son. The van had begun to spin and I prayed quickly that I would not hit an oncoming log truck or roll upside down. I had the odd thought that this was like playing Mario Kart for real. I actually hollered “Gators Forever” in case that was the last time I’d get to say that.

Moments later, the van stopped moving. I realized I had closed my eyes. When I opened them and looked around, I

was off the road on the right side, pointing the wrong direction about five feet from the point where it dropped off down the hill to Miller's farm. I was all in one piece. I got out. Then I was frightened. My new van looked like it had been beaten to death by a giant monster or had lost a transformer war. I began to shake. Large pieces of what was the stove were strewn all over the road. My first thoughts were about the programs. Then more lucidly, I wondered what insurance company would believe my story. "Oh, yeah hit by a stove, go sleep it off." Worse than that, the truck that had dropped its stove cargo in front of my van was nowhere to be seen. As I wondered what to do next, Mr. Miller arrived. "My God. Coach Lane, what did you hit? "It was a... stove." "Are you OK?" "I guess." "I thought you might have hit somebody." "Yeah, somebody 11 feet tall and made of cast iron." He began to laugh. Then he apologized and whipped out his cell phone to call 911.

About five minutes later, the stove-dropping truck crept back into view, pulled off the road just behind me, but no one got out. I walked up to the truck. The old man that was driving actually ducked down in the seat. Ah, shit, I've scared paw-paw. The passenger, who looked about 20, began to reach under the seat. I had a flash that he might be going for his gun, so I stood back from the truck and held my hands out to indicate that they were empty and that I was not armed. They both sat up but did not make a move to get out.

I approached the truck slowly and tapped on the window. The driver rolled his window down about two inches, "What do you want?" I decided I had to be funny. I bowed just a bit and said in my most courtly voice, "Excuse me, good sirs, you seemed to have dropped your stove." The passenger began to laugh. The driver was still wary. "You're not going to beat anybody up?" "No, of course not." Then he noticed my hat. He asked me if I was from the school. I said I was. He smiled. He began to name his grandkids. I told him I had taught them all and was going to introduce his cheerleader granddaughter if I ever managed to get back to the school. He was all smiles after that. The passenger, however, became somewhat morose wanting to know if I was going to pay for the stove I had ruined. I decided to ignore that. The police arrived.



Though the local constabulary knew who I was, and the truck driver confirmed my story, they all laughed at me while we filled out the paperwork. The policeman told me that the older driver, 87, had seen a program the night before where one person involved in a two-car pile up had beaten the other driver with a tire iron, and he somehow imagined that I might do the same to him. I just looked at my shoes. I got them to call Lakeview and have the coaches dispatch someone else to get the programs. The tow truck arrived. The driver whistled at the wreck and laughed at the story as the policeman practiced telling it. "Somebody's going to send my kid to college paying for this one," said the wrecker as he cinched up what was left of my van. I had told the police that I could not bend over, which was the gospel truth, but I refused medical treatment. I did accept a ride back to school.

I felt like a standup comic telling my story in the field house. Once everyone saw that I was not seriously hurt, we had a jolly time. Even my sweet wife of so many years, once she got over the shock that I had destroyed the van but was not hurt, laughed uproariously at the story. I felt like Bozo the clown--with a major headache. I took about five Excedrin. When the programs arrived, I was feeling no pain and decided I could announce the game.

Evidently, after the wreck and the yucks everyone got from it, the stars over Campti returned to their rightful place or perhaps their better than rightful places. Senior Night went off perfectly. We beat the Bull Dogs 14-7 on a wild punt return by a freshman safety who went the wrong way, away from the forming wall of linemen, and managed to outrun the only defender who saw him bail out for a 52 yard score.

One call from Edwin Dunahoe convinced the Saferight insurance company that their driver, who got five citations, was in enough of the wrong that they should repair my van, provide me with a rental car, and pay for me to go to the chiropractor. The only available rental car in Natchitoches turned out to be a brand new Cutlass Supreme that I got to drive for six weeks while my car was fixed. I went several times a week



to the chiropractor until I could touch my toes again. I was proud of the fact that I missed no school.

The funniest incident in the stove vs. van story occurred first hour on the Monday after Senior Night. I was determined not to just tell the story all day. Everyone knew the details anyway. Lakeview is a small place. I was determined to press on with school. When I went to write some stellar information on the board, I could not reach high enough to begin at the top. Suddenly, one of my clowns in the back achieved a career funny moment. "Hey, Coach Lane is all stoved up!" The place collapsed in laughter. I had survived and had become proverbial in the bargain.

I still get my car inspected at the body shop where I got the van repaired. Every time I pull in there, someone will holler, "Hey it's the stove guy!" It is certain that if I am buried in Campti when my time comes they will inscribe the words "stove guy" on my headstone. I am just very glad that they did not do it the day the stove and I met close up.

Yes, there are times in your life when the ordinary is shaken by something dangerous, challenging, or absurd. For me, it turned out to be all three. I have resolved myself somewhat to the idea that my fifteen minutes of fame turned out to be a violent encounter with a rolling stove, but everyone laughs, and as they do, I am glad not to be commemorated by the 14th wooden cross, the one that people would snicker at as they drove by it.

The only lasting effect of this event was the premature death of the van. Though resurrected afterwards, it never worked quite right again. I also am very careful around people hauling loads in pickup trucks, but that is a good idea anyway.





## THE CONQUEST ROXIE JAMES

A long time ago there lived a great king  
Who lived in a land well known  
But then that king died with no children beared  
And no one to carry the throne  
Three men from afar all vied for the land  
But none the title deserved  
Prior agreements, blood, and politics  
Were all the reasons served  
Battles were fought and blood was shed  
All for one sacred crown  
It became more apparent to all those coherent  
The great Kingdom was being worn down  
Then one of the men he gained an advantage  
Let's just call him Will  
With 600 ships and 2000 horses  
He came to this country to kill  
News of the arrival spread wild like a fire  
In the hearts of all it brought fear  
Some natives rebelled, and brought William hell  
But most simply shed a tear  
The date in their mind they will always  
remember  
The date in their mind is fixed  
For it's simple to reason, it's simple to know  
It's the conquest of 1066



## 12 O'CLOCK IN TEXAS MALLORY WAUGH

It's 12 o'clock in Texas,  
And the rain's a pourin' down.  
Yes it's 12 o'clock in Texas,  
And my tears are runnin' down.  
My man left me today,  
I put him in the ground.  
My man left me today,  
I caught him foolin' around.  
And my tears were pourin' down,  
I laid that two-timin' ass in the ground.  
I caught him with my best friend,  
My heart it did pound.  
He was messin' with my best friend,  
When I shot them both down.  
Well at 12 o'clock in Texas,  
I was puttin' up a fight,  
But at 12:01 in Texas,  
The cops read me my rights.  
And my tears, oh they fell,  
When I was thrown in the prison cell.  
On death row in Texas,  
In this prison cell.  
But not afraid of dyin',  
For I'm already in hell.  
Well it's 12 o'clock in Texas,  
And they're ringin' my death bell.



# MY NAME PART II

TWONZETTA SAMUEL

Who in the world, what in the world, how could this be?  
What were they thinking when they named me?!  
Young and dumb  
They didn't know  
Everybody just decided to let their creativity flow.  
The starting letter is a 'T', why oh why do they think it's a  
'P'?  
It's Twonzetta, not Poinsettia  
And No I was not born in December  
The month is September,  
If you must know  
Yes my first and middle name rhyme,  
SO!  
Leave me alone, don't ask me  
I'm still trying to create this name,  
Only I can give it an identity.  
No my family is NOT African-American, just simply black,  
And could you please cut me some slack!  
Yes, the last name is Nesbitt and yes my uncle is Tim.  
Should I even bother to tell you that:  
I'M NOT HIM!  
My cousins are Jabar, Eric, and Derrick,  
This is no new find  
Yes I am aware that they fight all the time.  
But if you please,  
I have decided not to intertwine our destinies.  
Give me that chance, let my destiny be  
And I'm sure you will quickly see that,  
I DEFINE ME!  
Beautiful, articulate, and determined  
To walk outside the mold  
For my destiny  
Your hands  
cannot hold.



**MYSTIC SHARECROPPERS III**  
PHOENIX SAVAGE



# DESTINATION UNKNOWN

STETSON BLADE MARCANTEL

A splash  
Falling water  
Crashing down  
Blue  
Blue becomes the sky  
Wind racing, howling  
Wind screeching  
Blue as far as the eye can see  
A swish  
Thousands of seeds  
Growing up  
Green  
Green becoming the grass  
The solid ground, enduring  
The ground bearing all  
Green under the blue  
A swoosh  
A bright glow  
Shining everywhere  
Yellow  
Yellow becomes the sun  
The star of the morning, burning  
The sun illuminating all we see  
Yellow in between the blue and green  
A dash  
Wood and Steel  
Dull and old  
Gray and black  
Here and there  
The tracks are made  
Across the ground they glide  
Under the morning sky



A twist  
A blend  
Blue and red  
To create the centerpiece  
Burning engines

Smokeless stack  
The heavy locomotive  
Tears down the endless track  
Locked forever  
In an endless run  
Destination unknown  
Never reaching home  
All the colors  
The bright yellow  
The windy blue  
Solid green  
The dull gray and black  
Blue and red  
And all the vague colors hid in between  
Empty colors  
Building a prison of joy  
A happy painting  
A joyful day  
Of never-ending pain  
Locked away  
Ever riding the endless rails  
In the smokeless locomotive  
All alone  
As the conductor yells  
Estimated arrival  
To destination unknown  
Never.





## THE TEST CHRIS CALLAHAN

1 square, 2 square, four. Pi r square, cornbread r round.  
“Fill fully, Number 2 only,” she said. Scribble. Scrabble. Blank  
ovals,  
filling in darkly. A full mind emptying out. Pretty patterns,  
plotting points. Scribble. Scrabble. Tick. Tock. Hot lead and  
burning rubber. Eggs are to birds as b is to c. It’s getting  
shorter, all getting duller. Faster! Hurry! Faster! Turn The Page!  
Filling and blanking. Scribbling, scrabbling. The Ticking!  
The Tocking! Poor numb hand, poor numb mind. “Time,” she  
called.  
Pretty patterns, nothing less and nothing more. Breakneck pace,  
just another failed test.

I am not a painter  
 a masterpiece 2 me is most beautiful when u lay  
 ur body atop mine moving effortlessly with ease  
 with ur paint brush im ur easel  
 u trace ur moans in2 my skin  
 i paint my songs on2 ur heart so that it lasts.  
 Swimming terrifies me yet I appreciate the movement  
 of ur body  
 i enjoy the story it tells  
 the drip drip drip dripping of ur river faucets flowing  
 fluently in2 the december of my springs  
 rising up like waterfalls  
 the small waves enlarged  
 crashing down gently in2 the likes of me.  
 Dancing across the bed comes familiar 2 me  
 strong legs, strong hands  
 u raise me 2 the sky  
 (the soil feels good between my toes)  
 i lift my legs up so high they go beyond the galaxy  
 u join me in heaven.  
 Et i write u across the walls  
 Pencil u on2 the floor  
 My intent means so much more than  
 2 be the best  
 Art student there is 2 be  
 2 write the next big poem  
 2 inspire or incite  
 I just want 2 stencil stanzas on2 ur soul.  
 Come,  
 Let me teach u a lesson...



## GABRIELLE CHRIS PRUDEN

The seats at gate B24 smell funny, but for no apparent reason. They aren't stained or particularly dirty. The plane is delayed and the passengers sit restlessly in their smelly seats. Each focuses on his final destination and the tedious ride about to depart. The call comes and the plane slowly fills. The gate agent finishes her last check, but stops when she catches sight of Gabrielle. Gabrielle is a regular and uses the flight for work. She walks to the counter late, not rushing, heels in hand – stiletto with that wide strap that fits snug around her slender ankle. The gate agent lets her on the flight, but not without a wink and a sigh. The wind shakes the jetway to the rhythm of her hips in a determined walk, making her skirt flail in cooperation with her curves. She greets the flight attendant and, as she makes her way to a seat near the back of the plane, smiles. The other passengers notice her arrival and collectively hold their breath with a mix of excitement and dread. A young child, confused by this reaction, innocently asks his mother, "Who is that pretty lady?" Quickly shushing her son, the mother replies in quiet terse language, "She is the in-flight prostitute." Gabrielle takes her seat next to one excited male, and after adjusting her shoes, brings a brush from her purse. Brushing her long brown hair with rhythmical strokes, she soon loses herself in the activity and



the boundaries of personal space drop from her. She begins rubbing her thigh against her neighbor's leg, while her hair blows into the aisle. He is obviously interested but has not the value Gabrielle needs to fulfill her requirements. She decides to visit the bathroom to help her search. Traveling the length of the plane, she smiles at every potential customer, discreetly holding three fingers pointed toward the floor. She enters the lavatory and the occupied sign blinks once, quickly, like she accidentally fumbled with the lock, and turns off (Gabrielle has worked on this technique for quite some time). She waits as one by one the businessmen, young and old, in their suits and ties, walk casually down the aisle following Gabrielle's scent like bloodhounds.

Gabrielle is a hard worker, and after the flight lands she takes only thirty minutes for a quick lunch before the return. When she finally arrives home, she is tired, but satisfied with a job well done. She is always the first to exit the plane to sit by her usual gate B24 and watch the contented faces of her clients, as they hurry home for dinner with their wives and children.





## STETSON BLADE MARCANTEL

A hundred miles to  
nowhere. A spider sits on  
an overgrown sign.

Empty city streets  
plastered with yellowed paper  
From a time long past.

Ancient metal frames  
sit as relics of the past.  
Misplaced vanity.

Cracked and broken stone  
tower over empty streets.  
Forlorn monuments.

Sound echoes on walls,  
ghosts crying across ages.  
Bittersweet sirens.

Footprints in the stone.  
The steps taken by those old,  
forever walking.

Weapons of power  
lie rusting in their glory.  
Hallowed salvation.

A raven perches  
on a bleached skull eyeing all,  
speaking, "Nevermore."

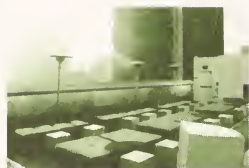
Oh, tragic landmark  
what noble and ancient race  
once lived on this land?

# NOBLE AND ANCIENT



# THE LIGHT OF A NEW DAY

KAMAL HAMDY



## EMPIRE OF DREAMS

RANDALL FREDERICK

civilizations exist by mutual consent  
and are subject to change without notice  
for no household can stand  
'cept they be united,  
divided empires, dreams, and kingdoms  
fail and fall like rain

but kings and knights do reign  
(with their ladies' consent)  
in empires and kingdoms  
where little notes are carried without notice  
between a queen and he who she has knighted  
rising to full authority over her disrobed glory, he stands

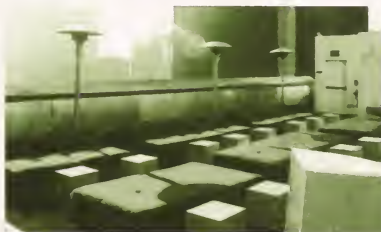
riding across her outstretched lands  
conquering her like so many kingdoms before, he reigns  
for those unnoticed notes turn to whispers turn to touches  
turn to bodies united  
with full royal, queenly, sighing, liquid consent  
all behind chamberdoors and hallways without notice  
these secrets of the kingdom

for there is no kingdom  
he desires more than her body, kneeling at the touch of her  
hand  
shivering, quivering, whimpering, mewling, as he strokes  
and caresses her lotus  
elements of her burning body, his kisses like rain  
all with amorous, adoring, delightfully liquid consent  
his sword in her full-bodied sheath, united

intertwined, he floods her inflamed inner gates,  
    their bodies united  
and caresses her back kingdom  
willingly, she bows and consents  
to take off her royal golden band  
crowned in her divinity, she falls apart,  
    with pleasure and pain  
collected each time, as he waters her pink, dewy  
    lotus

others, these two notice  
friendships and loyalties divided  
for the heart is an organ of fire  
    unquenched by the elements of time and rain  
divided empires and kingdoms  
and a knight exiled to the ends of the land  
by mutual consent

but this memento she gives, that royal band  
and the tears between them like rain  
what passes between them going without notice







A SONG FOR YOUR MAMA DANE CLAYTON

Sometime before the end of us  
I was down to half-pack days  
and completely out  
when we met at your house  
over TV trays and the evening news.  
She was touching tips against the advice  
of the Healthcast  
in Guns 'N Roses.  
I offered a shaky hand  
and she handed me the one with lipstick.

Remember, I used to pay for us both  
and throw the pennies in the trash can  
so the little kids would never find them?  
You loved the excess  
and I could cover the difference  
plus the cost of a DVD.  
She knew what the deal was with movie  
nights,  
why you always wore a skirt;  
probably knew that I was doomed  
when she saw all my T-shirts had some year  
printed on them for some brief event  
or reunion tour  
and that I couldn't quit:  
not the way I stared,  
not anything.

I wanted to write a song for your mother,  
but I can't  
because I'm fucked  
and this is it: it doesn't rhyme  
and I sure as hell won't sing.  
So deliver this anyway you know how  
to those who love what they ought not to,  
standing in the gas station parking lot,  
a fresh pack of smokes in-pocket  
and a small coin  
without another to jingle against.



# TUESDAY WITH DAISY

MARY BETH WIDHALM

so I'm wading in the unforgiving piss-yellow pool of the  
street lamp/drowning gargling, sputtering, spitting/some  
nursery rhyme wackbards & waiting for some green. the  
fact is that my man came in from Memphis, the smell of  
blue bacon trailing him to statelines,/ & this shit is sup-  
posed to be killer. & I'm winking at this curly blonde  
across

the street./ her name's

Daisy, dancing in the window in some electric pink paja-  
mas that fall apart when you pull on/one lacy ribbon. I  
want that ribbon

tied around my finger. I want to drum a rhythm on the  
sidewalk to strip her/and wrap myself around her hips  
or/wrist or neck or heart and squeeze until my sweaty  
palms can prove my lustful dazed devotion.

& here he comes (always late, it's hard to say)/ here  
comes my man, stomping up second/shoes whiter than  
god's teeth,/formless/ black hurricane hoodie half swal-  
lowed him whole./I smell him

before he turns the corner and I break Daisy's gaze  
with/eyes I know she's seen before. /my sweaty hand  
meets his sweaty hand/ but my eyes pull back to her like  
clockwork cat & my man/ thin that bitch'd suck my dick  
with that 20 bucks you got for me?/ and if I didn't need  
this guy, my man, to like me I would have wailed on him

*she's an angel a fucking angel she's desperate  
she's alone she's scared she's fucking scared  
and you you don't deserve to look at her you  
wad of shit/ she may be a great lay but her  
heart is dead*



but anyway I laugh and cough I guess/she's got nice tits but if they ever let her out of that cage, I wouldn't fuck that shit with a 10 foot pole.

eyes dart marking seconds & I see/ she's staring at me with hollow eyes she knows I've seen before./(hips and tits still rolling like waves like the moon is pulling her pussy with fishing line)

when he stops laughing, let's take a walk, her stare still digs knives in my turned back/ & over my shoulder I flip her off.

I said it cause it's probably true

I only obsess over what I can't have

I said it cause her dignity is an insignificant price to pay for a good deal on a half.



# HOME OF A HERO

## TERANDA DONATTO

ARGUS





FIRST PLACE PHOTOGRAPHY

**MY FLORIDA**  
SARAH HUNT



# THE CITY

AMANDA ROE

SECOND PLACE ART

ARGUS

**STROLL DOWN THE HALL** MARY MANNO



SECOND PLACE PHOTOGRAPHY



**HARVEST**

REBECCA EDWARDS

THIRD PLACE ART

**ARGUS**

# ABSTRACT SUNSET

CHARLOTTE CHATMAN

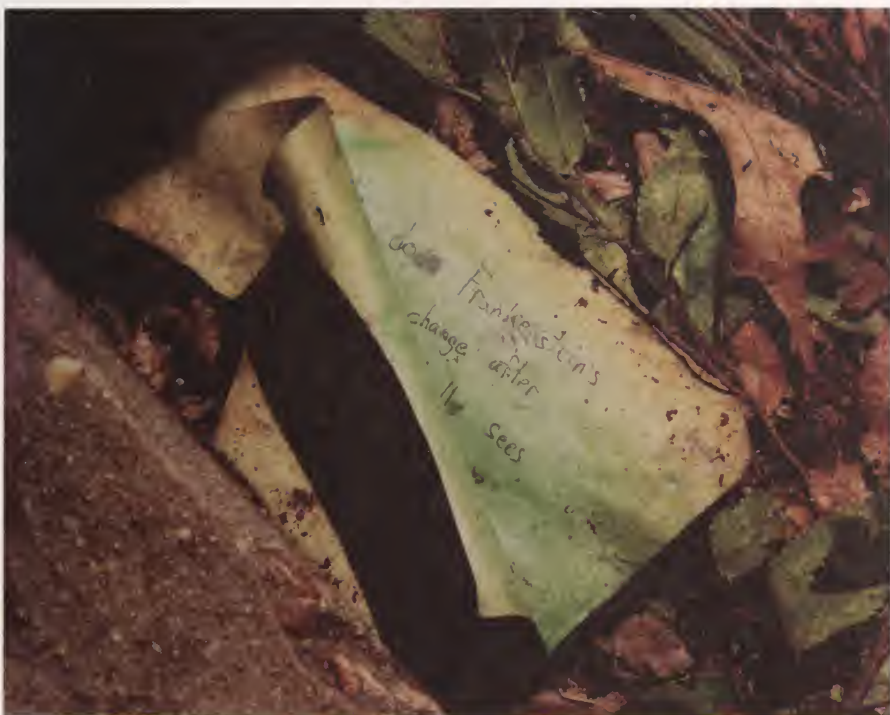




CONTEMPLATION KAMAL HAMDY



ARGUS



# DISCARDED THOUGHTS

KERA SIMON



**GIRL WITH MASK**  
AMANDA ROE

FIRST PLACE ART



**SIMPLACID**

DANIELLE KENNY

THIRD PLACE PHOTOGRAPHY



# JELLYFISH ANDI MCKAY

the stench of day gathers in time,  
the wetness of my shirt clings to my spine.  
i came to find something for my own good,  
i came to find out if you would  
let me move and swing with limbs like jellyfish  
who are born of lightning and the sea's kiss.

and if i had been born of someone's kiss  
i'd hope to revel somewhere in time  
and live under the waves like the jellyfish  
feel the change to liquid from bone in my spine  
and you laugh and say i never would  
you ask: "how would that do you any good?"

i've become so bored with bad and good  
and so intolerant of any one else's kiss  
because you smell of heat and hickory wood  
and you taste like the sea everytime;  
of the sea, of sweat, of the back of my spine  
and i melt down just like a jellyfish

but the crowd is weaving like a jellyfish  
we're all here for our own good  
twisting and bending from our spines  
where palms high and night sky kiss  
our little moment of the only time  
we stretch ourselves as we said we would



oh, god, if only i could i would  
spend my life like a jellyfish  
(only) if you were the sea, and i in time  
will find you are nothing or all that's good  
like the sea or crowd or when we kiss,  
i stand down, it's the evolution of my spine

oh, I know how the seas pine  
and just how well we all would  
be the victim's of no one's kiss  
or lose our spines like jellyfish  
but i do this for my own good,  
i just do this every time.

[you check the time, your spine like a tree  
it's good that you would be so free as  
to kiss me when i'm limp as a beached jellyfish]



# MORE WAITING

KERA SIMON

“Is he breathing?” I ask, walking to the side of the bed. I feel his chest; the old man is so weak.

Grandma washes dishes, finding whatever she can to take her mind off of her emotional turmoil. She doesn’t cry. I’ve never seen her cry. Her voice breaks when she refers to footprints in the sand, but I don’t look. I can’t.

We’ve been waiting, just waiting for the past two days. The nurse said he would die yesterday. We don’t know what keeps him going.

I walk to the window and watch my little cousins play. They make too much noise and don’t understand the significance of the silence. We try to keep them outside.

“I barely know these people,” I tell myself. “It’s a shame how only weddings and funerals bring families together... Well, my family.”

Grampa takes a long breath followed by a small moan. It’s the only way we know he’s in pain. He can’t tell us when he hurts. He hasn’t been able to speak for 30 years, ever since “the accident....”

“I wonder what he was like,” I continue to think as I stare out of the window.



Dad would tell us stories about how Grampa raised him and his older brothers. He seemed pretty strict.

"I've always wondered what his voice sounded like...."

Seek-a-word, muted TV, empty beer bottles... Cigarette smoke rises into the dim-lit sky.

I listen to the bullshit behind me. After just two days with these "relatives," my inner-temper is getting short.

"God, these people are aggravating... I don't know how Grandma stands it," I gripe to myself.

Grandma has been very tolerant. She's taken care of her ailing husband for almost 30 years since "the accident," and she watched her family run around with about as much sense as a retarded rock.

Grandma sits in her rocker with her newest grand-baby. She waits for everyone to settle down. She's just waiting.

The voices get louder as more beer is consumed. People are laughing as the old man struggles to breathe.

"Who the fuck ever heard of drinking beer during a death-watch?" I bitch silently to myself. "These people are so self-oriented. This is not right."

Dad's oldest brother starts preaching again, with a slight glaze over his eyes....

"Oh, Uncle Johnny, quit crying."

Water bottles, blankets, goosebumps. The sound of dark silence and shallow breathing fill the room.

I sit with my book by a lamp at 3:30 a.m. My sister and I take shifts to watch over Grampa.

He coughs--I go to the bed. He moans-- I go to the bed. He's quiet--I go to the bed.

"The old man has me up every fifteen minutes," I whisper softly to myself as I make my way to his bedside.

I fight my tired eyes and listen to the IV push fluid into his old veins. Grampa looks pale and his

hands are cold. His eyes are rolled back and his mouth is open.

"Is he breathing?" I say a little bit louder, only to fall on sleeping ears.

I check his chest. It still moves--barely... More waiting....

Tear-streaked cheeks, rosary beads, strained breathing. Early morning light streams into a crowded living room.

Grandma leads the rosary prayers.

"Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee," is said in somber unison.

I stand behind my Dad and hold the hand of a once-foreign cousin.

"I got nervous so quick when he stopped breathing and now I feel nauseous," I tell the friend of familiar blood. "He gave us quite a scare. We still don't know what he's waiting for."

I hold my head down so the tears will slide off more easily. I can't say the prayers out loud; my throat hurts too much.

The nurse says that Grampa is falling, but it could still be a while; which to everyone means--more waiting.

A flash of white light is surprising in the orange-lit room. Uncle Johnny is taking pictures.

"You gotta be kidding me. And I thought I was camera-crazy...Only my family...."

Cold biscuits, pajamas, soft chuckles. The family sits together to share old memories while warm smiles spread throughout the room.

"We're all so tired," I say to myself, but the laughter in the background stifles my thoughts.

I stare out of the same window as yes-

terday. No kids to pretend to watch--just the wind.

"We may not know each other very well, but I guess we have to love each other," I think with a smirk.

My cousin takes me by the hand and shows me a picture of Grampa when he was a soldier in WWII. Her son asks her who that picture is of, and she proudly says, "That's old Grampa."

I look over my shoulder where the old man is quiet. His lips are blue.

"Is he breathing?" I ask out loud.

The nurse shuffles to the bed, feeling his wrist, and looks at her watch.





These shades of blue they always treat me wrong  
These shades of blue they always treat me wrong  
And so I'm left just writin' this here song.  
Steel blue, I'm through with you  
Royal, you were disloyal  
Midnight, you bared no light  
Azure, made me demure  
These shades of blue they always do me wrong  
These shades of blue they always do me wrong  
And tears – down my face – roll along.  
And there you laid  
And here I prayed  
For each damn shade  
A pain is laid  
You treat me wrong you diff'rent shades of blue  
You treat me wrong you diff'rent shades of blue  
So I guess I'll just be through with you

## SHADES OF BLUE ROXIE JAMES





# ADLAY'S GLASSES

RYAN BONNET

Glasses always lopsided, slipping down his nose, give him a Faustian intellectual look, as if he is about to be consumed by his own mind.

And me wishing I wore glasses and wore them like that. He pushes them up. Why? He doesn't need to.

I put them on once and, figuring out that he was nearsighted--or was it farsighted, I can never tell. It's the one where he can't see far away. Let them fall haphazardly down, letting my intellect consume and digest me and spit me out sticky and covered in yellow fluid, like a newborn baby. I am a baby at least with these glasses on.

My vision is blurred, lights are distorted, and suddenly

Everything seems too perfect and innocent, the oval lenses fit my eyes too well and, with everything distorted, my mind recedes, the blurriness and light offending it, as if it's an evil entity and my brain cuddles up in its little niche in the wall and quivers, letting survival instincts kick in, taking away the awkward and time-consuming analytical nature usually presented. I hate new things.



i.

uncle died – stared in  
the casket too long. dad said,  
child, it's rude to stare.

i stared anyway  
wondered why clothes were ironed  
– knew he hated ties

grandma grabbed my arm  
you'll forget him, it's the smell  
that you'll remember

grandma died – death's smell  
lingered long after handshakes  
with people i hate

dad made me accept  
broccoli casseroles that said,  
i don't care she's dead.

looked at her just once –  
thought it was dreadful to be  
frozen to one space

ii.

you died – didn't go  
to your wake – watched the sun set  
frozen to one space

relatives they called  
each got the same reaction  
i don't care she's dead

you died – didn't care  
i don't go to funerals  
of people i hate

dad came by today  
said – why is it just the bad  
that you remember

found the worst of you  
lives on in me – i must say  
i hate our blood ties

i want to stare at  
your corpse that infected me  
– but it's rude to stare



# DEMOLITION KEISHA JOHNSON

I can't decide on how to handle you there in front of me.  
You're analyzing my every word and my every movement.  
Dissecting, almost obsessing.  
I can see the data processing in your grin.  
Abusing my tired drunkenness for everything that it's worth.  
I'm aware that this isn't the motivated rambling of an intellectual.  
I am aware that these are the vapid words  
Fumbling from lips that only know feelings, not facts.  
And I just know that I can only watch  
Through the spaces between the fingers  
Of my hands in front of my face.  
I hear all of my words crashing  
Because of my mouth's faulty brakes.  
I can see you sitting there  
Reveling in my state of semi-consciousness,  
Wondering if I'll get any worse.  
Wondering if you get to witness it.  
You and I both know my words are only going to get me in trouble.  
You and I both know I'm handing you the keys to the demolition ball.  
Mark the red X on my pride.  
Its days are numbered, starting now.  
Starting at the point where my lips met yours.  
I moan, you laugh.  
Deep down, I know you care more about your cigarettes and your girl  
friend  
Then/than you do me.  
I'm sprawled across the carpet, uninspired, but on fire.  
My words still falling, but far less clearly now.  
I'm stumbling incoherence.  
My body shakes and it's good, but only till I come  
To my senses.  
When it's over you get your things to leave  
As you say goodbye you lean against the door-jamb.  
Six feet of unapologetic smugness; fiddling with your fingernails.  
Telling me not to be so hard on myself,  
I've been one of the most interesting wrecks you've created.



# HOLY SONNET ONE: THE BODY CHECK

MALLORY WAUGH

How can you holy God love sinful me  
When my heart is wrecked with indecision,  
And my life anything but your vision?  
Your people dis' me for my heresy  
And yet you always call me family.  
Still, my wicked heart remains full of division  
Like a late night show on cable television  
And hardly like your son from Galilee.  
For I can hardly be called a deaconess,  
'cause I act more like a Texas redneck  
Who feels less at home in a church than a Chevrolet.  
But you love me through all my dirty grittiness  
And sometimes give me a needed body check  
So I'm back again on heaven's highway.



# AMONG STRANGE BRETHREN

ROBERT LANE

“Dad, how big is God?”

“You mean how big is he physically? That’s difficult to say; I am not sure you could measure him like that.” My son brushed his heroic surfer-length hair out of his eyes and prepared to reload another question. It was Sunday and we had just walked to the car. I could tell he had been paying attention in Sunday School. His warm brown eyes lit up with the possibilities.

“Well, how about Jesus then, how tall was he?”

“There are no photographs of him--big enough to be a carpenter. Scripture doesn’t seem to say. They do hint that he was not remarkable in appearance. I’m not sure what that means.”

“Dad, Mom says you don’t enjoy church any more, is that true?” So that was it. The general negative mood I was in had been connected to the source of the irritation by my clever ten-year-old son.

“Well, the church part is OK. I enjoy worship. It’s that so many of these folks think they have God all figured out. I’m not sure I do. We tend to be so quick to condemn people to hell when they are not just like we are. I have genuine trouble with that. I’m not sure you can put God in a box.”

“So, God is bigger than a bread box?”

“Yeah, and that’s my final answer.” He seemed pleased; he smiled at his own joke. I remembered the verse about how you had to enter the kingdom as a child. My son was kingdom bound. I, on the other hand, was facing troubles related to how big God was.

In Moby Dick, Ishmael tells us that whenever he feels “mean and spleenful” and “like knocking off people’s hats” that he goes to sea. I have identified with feeling mean and spleenful for several years now. Though I have never been to sea, I know well how Ishmael felt. For several years a root of unhappiness has twisted itself around my soul until it begin to resemble the trunk of a cypress tree. One by one, the things that gave me joy ceased to be the sources of comfort that they once were.

Work became a laundry list of thankless unpaid extra duties. The school board offered to pay us to tutor for the LEAP/EXIT test after school, then reneged on the money and made us do it anyway. I was once again selected to be in charge of the prom and no one wanted to help. The new, young teachers refused to sponsor any clubs or student afterschool activities, so the old dependable teachers were called on to double up. Already overloaded, I tried once again to prove I was indispensable. In doing so, I ran out of gas at the junction of what-else-are-you-going-to-do-for-us-street and lone-ranger-avenue. Church became an ongoing squabble over what color carpet should be purchased, and people whining about their right to heard in the meeting. Committees fought over

the pastor's job description. A genuine coup was pulled off in the youth department, and the more I went to church, the more my heart turned to stone. I could not believe that God, whatever his size, was pleased with us as a group. Everyone's favorite sport seemed to be sending others to hell.

I found it difficult to unwind at home and even my sweet wife began to withdraw from the brooding Heathcliff I had become. I snapped at my family for no reason. I was often jumpy and on edge, which scared my son.

"Do you remember what you did the last time you fell into one of these dark moods?"

"Yeah, that was the year I went to California to school to learn to do stress management." I almost didn't finish the thought. I'd spent the summer in hypnotherapy school. Ironically enough, that seemed to be the only activity I had been enjoying since I could focus totally on someone else. Only when I got to do hypnotherapy for someone did I feel like my old happy self. Some people have thought me odd for my pursuit of the unseen. My dad insists I'm hardwired that way. I once paid several thousand dollars to learn how to fire walk. I also took the additional class to be able to teach others. It's really not as hard as it looks. Remote viewing, which involves projecting an image with your mind to someone at a distance and having them draw what you are looking at, turns out to be totally bogus. So is Cave Breathing, at least for me. This cave in Texas was reputed to have air that would cause religious visions if you stayed down in the heart of the cave at night. I did not have a vision. I got a sinus infection. My hypnotherapy studies, however, I had a real passion for.

"You should work some of that hypnotic magic on yourself." My wife's comment sealed the proposition. I had to do something.

I decided that what was needed was a hypnotherapy conference, where I could get some CEUs, upgrade my certificate

and have some fun While surfing the net, I happened upon an advertisement of just such a training, to be held in upstate New York over the MLK holiday weekend. After an exchange of emails to other hypnotist friends, I found that about a half dozen of these were planning to attend. In addition, the conference was not just about hypnotherapy, but healing in general. It was to be an interfaith healing conference. That sounded like just what I needed. I was soon to learn how broadly the word \*interfaith\* can be defined.

The plane ride into the frozen beauty of upstate New York was uneventful. It proved once again that the coach section of an airplane is no place for a tall guy. The convention center was large and well appointed. When I arrived, the opening reception was in full swing. As I milled around and spoke to people, I realized how very eclectic this event was. Ethera Con Interfaith Healing Conference looked and felt very much like an odd cross between a Renaissance fair and Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Even the Christians I met were of unusual types. There was a charismatic Catholic priest who did aura readings and claimed to be able to heal others with a set of “sacred tuning forks.” There was another man whose last name was St. Clair who claimed to be a blood descendant of Jesus and Mary Magdalene à la the Da Vinci Code. He was a Gnostic Christian. Many others in this large gathering were polytheists, many of them witches. I had come among strange brethren.

My Baptist alarm began to go off in my head. I heard old Sunday School teachers telling me what happened when a backslider Christian like me got involved with nonbelievers. I was in spiritual danger here according to everything I’d been taught. I wiped my palms on my jeans legs and tried to clear the large frog that had suddenly jumped into my throat. Verses about good kings of Israel being corrupted by worshipping idols made a list at the back of my skull. My counselor self helped me gather my courage and just decide to see what would happen. I did hope I would not run into anyone I knew from home. “ Don’t be a hater, Bob, these people are healers,” I said several times to myself. As I practiced a little stress management breathing technique on myself, I began to feel better. I will admit that despite my initial concern, it did feel



balancing not to be the weirdest person in the room. All of the participants were healers of some type. The efficacy of this healing I was soon to discover.

The hypnotherapy training did not go exactly as planned, which turned out to be both good and bad. The clinical psychologist that I wanted so badly to study under did not appear. Instead, he sent his main student to teach us. We learned the technique that his mentor was famous for, and grouped up to practice. That afternoon, one of my hypnotist friends from our 1999 California training and I were chosen to be group leaders for additional practice. That evening, two unusual things happened. Our hypnosis teacher told me that I was the best hypnotist present. That made dinner taste good. The head of the conference asked me to fill in for a workshop instructor who had canceled at the last minute. "Do some of that marvelous trance you were doing upstairs." Empowerment. She wanted empowerment trance for pagans. I smiled at the challenge despite myself.

The presentation went like a dream. The large group was very responsive. I opened with my usual comments.

"Don't worry, folks, this is not witchcraft." This brought cascades of laughter. Wintree, the woman who taught tea leaf reading, responded. "Don't hold back, show us your skill." And I did. Thirty minutes later, when we came back to room awareness, several asked to just be covered up and allowed to remain on the carpeted floor. Wintree spoke of feeling like "very happy Jell-O." I felt like a kid with a new bike.

I was embraced and congratulated afterwards. Right there I was dubbed "the bayou wizard." It turns out that when you give a pagan "your energy," they give something in return. This was to become the most important part of my trip.

My first gift was a hand-painted T-shirt from one of the vendors. Next, the aroma therapist examined me with what looked like a twisted coat hanger from the cleaners. She

determined that I was “holding very old anger.” She then sprayed me with several types of flower essence designed to help me release my anger. As odd as it may seem, I did feel better when she was finished. Next, I was taken to a Reiki Life Energy healing session by a group called the Daughters of Isis. Reiki is like having benign electricity flow through your body. It is based on the idea that all spiritual things are made of energy and that there is a well of the Universal Good which can be tapped by someone who can “see the source.” The Reiki practitioner then channels this energy through their body and into the body of the recipient. I found it interesting that even masters of this craft cannot force you to take healing. You have to accept it. Reiki proponents insist that it is good for all kinds of pain, physical, emotional and spiritual. Though relatively new to the United States, Reiki is part of the catalog of Asian traditional medicine and has been for centuries. This process took about an hour, as they continually urged me to give up my anger. When I got up off the mat, nothing on my body hurt, a very singular occurrence. Things were taking an upward turn.

The last full day of the conference was “wear your witch hat day.” There were witch hats both classical and whimsical; some wore Viking helmets or horns, like Pan. Not owning a witch hat, I wore my Lakeview ball cap and got teased all day about worshipping gators. There were a few classes that morning that I cut. I did not attend wand making because I was not sure I could do so without laughter. I passed on divination for the same reason. I was also asked to “partner” with several of the Daughters of Isis for their fertility ritual, but politely declined. However, nothing I had to this point experienced prepared me for the coming of the Vikings.

Early in the afternoon, a young woman dressed as a Valkyrie ran up to me, bowed, and presented me with handwritten invitation to that evening’s event--the Nordic Healing Circle. This, I had been told, was the highlight of the conference. However, I had also been informed that this event was for master practitioners only. I inquired at the Viking area, and was granted a few minutes with the Winged Mistress. She looked at me and said, “Bayou Shaman, you have shown yourself a Master, but you must learn to ground lest the en-

ergy harm you.” Grounding, it turned out was meditative skill that one could learn. The young woman who brought me the invitation volunteered to teach me. It really consisted of me visualizing that I had roots growing out of my feet. After thirty minutes of practice, the young Viking woman was satisfied and withdrew inside the Viking enclosure.

That evening about seventy people, many in ritual attire, gathered inside the grand salon. There were flowing gowns in very bright colors along with lots of leather, a few in kilts, and some who actually carried brooms. There were those who were painted like American Indians or Egyptians. I felt rather underdressed. A woman dressed as a panther kissed me on the cheek on her way by. Then a horn sounded and the Vikings, worshipers of Odin, marched into the hall, led by Helga, the Winged Mistress, looking like a Wagner opera star. I said a secret prayer that I would not mess up church for these sincere people. Helga lighted a vase full of incense and called on the spirits of reindeer and snow, and every deity I had ever heard of, to be present. There, about number eleven on her list, was Jesus of Nazareth, called for my benefit. Very quickly, the very cold room became much warmer. Helga then asked for names and circumstances of those who were ill that needed healing. Everyone offered at least one name, like at prayer meeting. Then we joined hands and Helga called for the energy to be passed. I had been taught how to hand off the energy when it came to me, but was still not sure what would happen. Moments later the energy passed to me from the man on my left. I felt like I’d been struck by lightning, but leaned and passed it to the woman on my right who took the full hit. Then the energy was directed out through one of the Norse acolytes to the person that needed healing. Though there was an occasional break in the activity, the circle passed energy for about four hours. People sang, chanted, or grunted in various languages as we did higher levels for people with cancer and other fatal illnesses. I am sure that I was the only one there humming “There’s Power in the Blood.” It became tropically hot. I had removed my jacket and later my denim shirt, and before we were finished soaked my undershirt.

When Helga thanked all of the unseen forces and they “left,” it was suddenly cold again. When I got up from my chair and was embraced by those around me, the taproot of unhappy was gone. I do not have words for what happened nor do I have a label under which to file it. I had been healed by pagan Vikings. I am still better after returning to my own world. Faith or magic, I cannot make a call this time. I was taken in by strange brethren who loved a stranger enough to help find his way back home. After arriving back in my usual world I was not at all sure that anyone would believe what had happened to me. I felt a bit like Marco Polo when he was the only westerner to see China. The thing I could not deny was the reality of how I felt.

I caught my son working on his bike under the carport.

“I stole this from Mom’s refrigerator.”

“Sweet.” I handed him the foaming orange soda that was his absolutely favorite drink.

“Chief, I need to tell you something about the God being bigger than a bread box question you asked about a month ago.”

“Did you look up the answer, Dad?”

“No, I went and did research on the matter. It turns out that God is so big that some folks call him by different names. Our family will keep Jesus and hope he will keep us, but God turns out to be bigger than any one church or religious group. It’s not our job to send anybody else to hell. We’re just not going to worry about that part. God has folks everywhere, even where you might not suspect.”

“Cool. Are there any chips?”

And all is right with the world.





## GETTING DIRTY

SHAY ATKINS

I used to get my dress dirty  
Sunday mornings before church in  
the gritty dirt, like cinnamon  
sprinkled on the white frills  
of a cupcake. With black  
under my fingernails, my mother

would not be mad, my mother  
who had three girls that were usually dirty.  
Her worn hands were often black  
with potting soil as she would dig in  
the earth, planting rows of flowers, frills  
of color, from purple to yellow to cinnamon.

I used to make a mess eating cinnamon  
toast, every morning, that my mother  
made, crumbs nestled in the frills  
of my Rainbow Brite nightgown, already dirty  
from the chocolate milk I spilled in  
between the leather couch cushions, a black

streak leading to coins, crumbs and more black  
stains, along with the castaway grit of cinnamon.  
My sister and I used to swim in  
our mucky, brown pond while my mother  
would fish. All three of us smelly and dirty,  
my mom and sister in cutoffs, no frills



for them, as I splashed in my striped suit with frills  
on the butt. We also used to play with our black  
cur in the hollow tree, where it was really dirty  
as we worked in a factory making cinnamon  
until my mother  
would tell us it was time to come in.

I remember sitting in  
our kitchen in my pink birthday frills  
waiting for my mother  
to hand me the bowl with the remnants of black  
goo that I liked better than my cinnamon  
toast, and I would lick the bowl until it was clean and I was  
dirty.

My mother's hands are often still in soil and black,  
And most of my frills are still filled with grit like cinnamon,  
For there are many things that are worth getting dirty.





One black tablet is swallowed tonight.  
It is bitter and hard as it sinks down.  
The lungs cannot breathe,  
The legs cannot stand,  
One black tablet,  
What you do to men,  
And women who suffer from lack of color.  
Too bad there is only one more tomorrow,  
That never comes.  
One black tablet is written in tonight.  
It rescues the pained, and takes them to flight.  
The fear goes away, a burden is lifted.  
One black tablet desires a reading.  
Each tablet of white,  
But the yin is without the yang.  
No need to explain,  
The importance of balance.

KATIE QUEBEDEAUX

ONE BLACK TABLET

## BUFO MARLINDA PRUDEN

i licked that mother-fucking toad  
and sucked down the lactaid from tit  
with toes in clay so red & raw  
and tongue like a butterfly net  
catching twinkle-sun rays  
i swallow harder.  
taking lightning bug gulps  
into my mason jar stomach  
with holes punched in it,  
the sunlight syrup swirled  
with milk in a Nesquik concoction.  
that rushes as quick as Colorado rapids  
carving out cavernous veins  
as that plasmic hit bounced blood vessels  
like beach balls red & raw  
alighting on the surf  
of my subconscious:  
that beyond of placid waters deep  
where eyes swim in aqueous humor  
rich as whetted clay &  
taste as comical as a knock knock.  
i answer the door only to hear  
butterfly lips from a school girl mouth  
stained by an empty chocolate milk carton  
she whispered: you glow  
bugs battered broken wings that  
whistled cacophonous cadences in response  
and my eardrums exploded in a waterfall rush  
falling into pinnae puddles  
where my tympanic membranes served as boats.  
i floated until mourning's light butler  
brought breakfast to me in a death-bed  
where I lay, ajar with no holes in it.

# THE WHOLE ENTIRE STORY

## DANE CLAYTON

“Shit, I don’t even know where to start,” said Trey Cormier.

“Start with your friend.”

“Whadya wanna know?”

“Everything.”

“Well he was my ol’ buddy from high school, but I ain’t seen him in a while, so when I heard he got back into town, I went picked him up at his momma’s trailer. He was over there in I-raq, ya know. Been three years in the Marines, and hadn’t came home once to visit, so I’s dyin’ to see him. Me and Patrick used to raise hell all over Sabine Parish—ya know, not like breakin’ any laws or nothin’. Just. . .ya know.

“Anyway, I pulled up there in ma truck and I seen him sittin’ out front scratchin’ on his dog, smokin’ him a cigarette, and I say, ‘Hey boy, you tellin’ me that’s the best-lookin’ woman you could find in I-raq?’ Talkin’ ‘bout his dog, ya know. But he didn’t say nothin’. Ain’t even laughed. I had to call at him again, make sure he heard right, and he just looks up and me and says, ‘How’s it goin’, Trey?’ I say, ‘It’ll be goin’ better when you come get in this here truck and we get some fuckin’ beer in us!’ That’s about when I noticed he looked a little different than I remember him. And I ain’t talkin’ about the shaved head, neither. He just got up, kinda slow, and walked on over like he didn’t care if he ever went drank a beer with the guy that used to be his best buddy.

"I kinda didn't know what to say to him, so I just kept talkin' 'bout his dog. Said somethin' like, 'nice dog,' or whatever. I don't remember. And you know the first thing he says to me after we ain't talked for upwards of three years? Starts tellin' me 'bout how whenever they seen a dog over in I-raq, they shoot it or throw it off a cliff or somethin'—even puppies—'cause all the dogs there got rabies, and the ones that don't, gonna get it eventually, so they just kill 'em all. What the fuck am I s'posed to say 'bout that? So we just didn't talk 'til we got to the Conoco. And Patrick just sat there with his hands on his lap, lookin' out the winda like he never seen pine trees before or somethin'."

The Sheriff cut him off. "On second thought, why don't you skip a little bit of the beginning and get to where y'all went to see, uh. . ." he checked the folder in front of him, "Porter McInnis."

"Well that's where I start to blame yer department for shortcomin's leadin' up to the event."

"My department?" the Sheriff huffed.

"That's right. Me and Patrick was sittin' in the parkin' lot down at the Conoco, finishin' off a case of Keystone Light when yer ol' deputy pulls up and tells us we got to go, there ain't no litterin' in the parkin' lot of the Conoco. I tried to tell him we wasn't litterin', and he kept sayin' we was. Then I said how I cain't believe he's gon' make an American hero leave the Conoco on false charges, when this man went and fought for him so he could be free, but that ol' deputy didn't care. So he made us leave, and if he hadn't-a done that, nothin' ever woulda happened, but he did. And I wasn't drunk or nothin', cause my blood ain't like other people's, where they drink a few beers and get that blood-alcohol level where they cain't drive. I can drink a whole case maself and my blood just manufactures it up so I hardly even feel it, and I just had a half-a-case anyway."

"So we headed on out. By then, there wasn't nowhere to go, and I was thinkin' of takin' Patrick back to his momma's trailer 'cause I couldn't get more'n a sentence or two outta



him, and that wasn't like him one bit. But when we got back in the truck, he started tellin' me how he didn't appreciate all that back there, me callin' him a hero and everything. So I say, 'Well, would you rather me call you an asshole?' And he says, 'Call me what you want.' Then I say, 'I'll call ya Corporal Asshole,' ya know, tryin' to rile him up like when we used to hang out, but he didn't even care. He says, 'I ain't a corporal.' I asked then what was he, and he said he wasn't nothin'. Come to find out, the reason he was home is the Marines gave him a dishonor'ble discharge 'cause they caught him smokin' weed in I-raq. Even had to do ninety days in the brig—that's what they call jail in the Marines. He hadn't done nothin' wrong but smoke a little weed, either. He was cap'n of his own squad and everything.

"Now before I say this next part, I gotta take this time and plead my fifth amendment rights, so you cain't arrest me for what I'm 'bout to say, OK?"

"Go on, son."

"Alright. So I took this news pretty heavy and all, 'cause I know Patrick's a good ol' boy and a damn good Marine, and it ain't fair for them to treat him like that. I felt like I needed another beer, but I didn't have no more so I started to pull out this blunt I had wrapped up earlier, then I thought, 'Trey, don't try pullin' that blunt in front of Patrick. That's the thing that got him in trouble in the first place.' So I decided to head on down to Porter's house way the fuck out in the woods 'cause I knew he had somethin' for me, and he used to be real close to Patrick, too, but not as close as me and Patrick and not as close as me and Porter."

"What did he have for you?"

Trey shifted in his seat. "C'mon, main, ya know what I'm talkin' 'bout. Don't make me hafta say it." He leaned in close and whispered, "Porter cooks that ice."

"I's feelin' real bad, like I said, and I needed somethin' to relax ma nerves. So we went all the way back there, past Zwolle and down the gravel road after ya pass up the high school—that's where Porter lives with his girlfriend, Carla. I hate that bitch, but she went to high school with us, too, and if I want stuff from Porter, I gotta pretend to like her even though she's always been a bitch to me.

"Course, Patrick knew where we was headin' and he said he didn't do that no more, and he said he seen a counselor and shit and they told him to avoid his 'enablers,' whatever the fuck that is, but I was hard up for somethin' to relax ma mind so I took him anyway.

"When we pulled up, they had an ol' dog in the front yard—a deaf-ass cur dog with fucked-up eyes that wasn't even the same color, and it came at us hard as soon as we stepped out the truck. I's afraid Patrick was gonna kill it just outta instinct, bein' with them rabies dogs so long, but he just petted it and it was lickin' his fingers like it smelled somethin' good.

"And I guess ma truck made a commotion, 'cause Porter come outta the house with his AK-47 on his chest. Now I about shit maself when I seen that 'cause I thought for sure Patrick was gonna start havin' some of them flashbacks and go apeshit and kill Porter with his bare hands right then and there, but he was just calm as a cucumber. Porter's fuckin' paranoid about the cops comin' to his house 'cause of his lab and all, and he mighta shot Patrick with that haircut lookin' like a cop except I was there and he recognized me, then he recognized Patrick and he was happy as hell to see him after so long.

"We all went inside and the dog went in there with us. His name was Magoo, by the way, and I only tell ya that because I told ya Carla's name and I like that dog a lot better'n I like her. Anyway, soon I walked through the door I could smell he was cookin' shit—just nothin' but chemicals hittin' ya right in the nose. Takes a while to get where you can breathe normal in there. Porter said he didn't have nothin' for me on hand,

but he was cookin' up some fresh ice and if we'd wait a few hours, he was almost done. Patrick went to open a window to get rid of some of the smell, but Porter made him close it back 'cause he said if the neighbors smelled it they'd call the cops. He don't have any neighbors within half a mile, but that boy's so damn paranoid ya can't tell him anything that makes sense.

"Then Carla lit up a blunt and started passin' it around. I couldn't believe that shit. Ya got chemicals cookin' right there on the hot plate and yer gonna light a damn blunt? I looked over at Patrick to see if he was 'bout to go ballistic on her, but he ain't said shit, and when the blunt made it around to him, he just passed it straight to me without even hittin' it. So I said fuck it, if yer gonna light shit up regardless, I might as well get high while I'm waitin'.

"Porter took a break from his hot plate to show Patrick his AK-47 that he got off some guy down on Texas Street, so it ended up bein' just me and Carla smokin'. We was both suckin' as hard as we could 'cause we hate each other and we both wanted to smoke more of the blunt just to be an asshole, or a bitch in her case. Whenever company comes over, she don't even acknowledge 'em even if she knows 'em, like me and Patrick. She didn't even say hi to Patrick despite the fact he'd been gone upwards of three years, and she sure didn't say nothin' to me, 'cause I'm there all the damn time. If she got somethin' to say and yer three feet from her, she says it to Porter and Porter says it to ya. Shit, even Magoo don't wanna sit by her.

"I looked over at Patrick runnin' his hands across that AK-47 like it was a woman's leg, and he told Porter it was a good gun even though he got it from a guy on Texas Street. It felt kinda crazy lookin' at a guy you known since you was a little kid, and played with him and did all kinds of shit growin' up, and now yer starin' a man who's killed people and had people try to kill him, meanwhile you just been waitin' for ice back in Sabine Parish.

“Patrick asked him if he could take it outside and shoot it at the pine trees, but Porter was hard set against it. Said it would cause a racket. So we just sat around passin’ the blunt a while, skippin’ over Patrick, who was sittin’ with the gun between his legs aimed up at the ceilin’, lookin’ down the barrel. He had a face like he was at a funeral, and Porter musta seen it, too, ‘cause after a little while, he says, ‘I guess you can shoot it if you go out back and aim into the woods.’ Ya didn’t have to tell Patrick twice, ‘cause he was out the door before Carla could start bitchin’ to Porter ‘bout how the gun might attract attention and shit. I thought I might join him, but the idear of Carla suckin’ down that blunt by herself was just too much to bear.

“The rest is a blur. I remember hearin’ shots comin’ from out back, but real slow. Like he’d shoot once, and wait a good long time before he shot again. A good long time. And I remember Porter jumpin’ up at some point and sayin’ shit about some red phosphus or whatnot. I don’t know what he was talkin’ ‘bout. Him and Patrick were always the smart ones. I was never too good at school. And Carla was always just a bitch.

“But anyway, I remember those shots—pow . . . pow . . . pow—and Porter fiddlin’ with his hot plate. And I wouldn’t even say it was an explosion. More like the air just all of a sudden caught on fire, without makin’ even a sound. I fell out my chair and I closed my eyes, and it was just like a wave of heat passed over me, like if ya have a sunburn and ya just turn on the shower. Then I heard Magoo barkin’ and then some glass was breakin’. All the glass in the trailer just started to pop. Everyone was screamin’, carryin’ on, but I just couldn’t get my breath. I didn’t want no ice no more. Tell ya what, I never been to Hell, but I imagine if I went, it’d be every bit as hot as that trailer.

“I figured then and there I was gonna die. It almost didn’t make no difference, either. Ya know how yer life’s s’posed to flash before yer eyes and shit? Well mine took it about three seconds, and all I saw was fuckin’ Zwolle, Louisiana, gettin’ drunk and gettin’ high. I started chokin’ on the smoke, and



still I was thinkin', 'Damn, Carla, shut the fuck up already,' 'cause she was hollerin' so much I thought Magoo coulda heard her. Next thing I know, air starts rushin' in the door like it got sucked through, and there's a fireman standin' over me with an axe. Then I realize that ain't no fireman, that's Patrick with the AK-47. He grabs me under the armpits and starts draggin' me out, thumpin' down the steps, then he hauls me across the gravel all the way to the truck. It hurt like a sum-bitch, but I wasn't complainin'.

"Before I could say thank ya, he disappeared back in there, and a minute later he comes out with Porter on his shoulder. And Porter ain't whatcha call little. He probably got forty pounds on Patrick, but Patrick threw him down by me like a suitcase.

"Next, he come out with Carla, still hollerin' and coughin'. She wasn't two seconds out of that trailer before she was bitchin' at Porter for that red phosphus-whatever. Patrick looked down at me, and I seen somethin' I hadn't seen since that night before he took off for the Marines, and we was gettin' shit-faced for the last time on the roof of a school bus. He got that look right before he says to me, 'Wanna check if it's unlocked?' By mornin' that bus was fourteen feet below the highway in a ravine—and remember, I pleaded the fifth, so you cain't use that story against me. But I saw it. He bent over me and he says, 'I'm goin' after the dog.' I remember thinkin', shit, why didn't he get ol' Magoo before he got Carla? And I was just laughin' to myself, glad I was outta there.

"When yer lyin' on the ground way away from where shit's on fire or whatever, it's actually kinda cool, just watchin' the trailer go down bit by bit. It ain't hot or smoky, so you can just sit back, no worries. I guess it took a while for it to dawn on me that he wasn't gon' come back out. By then everything was on fire. Every winda, even the roof. It kinda melted in on itself, and then it was just like an ol' skeleton somebody set to burnin'.



"I was lookin' hard by then, knowin' he was gone, but I didn't feel sad even though he was my best buddy for a long time. Porter and Carla were arguin' 'bout some shit that don't matter, but I wasn't payin' attention. I was wonderin' what he saw. Ya know, what flashed in front of him when he was holdin' that dog and he realized he wasn't never comin' out again. It prolly took a while, considerin' how many places he'd been to. It's crazy, how you can have two people grow up the same exact place and do all the same shit together, but give 'em three years apart, and they got a lifetime of different shit to talk about. Ya know?"

Trey sniffed.

The Sheriff clicked the stop button on his tape recorder and leaned back in his chair. He collected his folder of papers wordlessly.

"You ain't gonna charge me, are ya, Sheriff?" Trey asked.

"Son, I think you can go home. 'Fraid I can't say the same for your friend, Porter."

"That's alright." Trey rose to his feet. "I think mebbe you cain't say that 'bout me, neither." He slipped through the interrogation room door, then out into the night, where the scent of pine was at once familiar and very strange.



Down the dirty Paris street I stumbled,  
drunk for the second, no third, time in my life,  
searching for the bar two bars ago where I left my jacket.  
Lost with a liquor-drenched mind, I laughed at every wrong turn.

I was drunk for the third time in my life  
in the city of lights that disappointed me upon first glance  
until I was lost on a culture-drenched street and took every wrong turn,  
only to find my vest as well as a friend

in the city of lights that suited me well after a second look.  
In its rough edges and blunt busyness,  
I found excitement as well as a friend.  
Tucked-away charm and profound treasures abound

among its rough edges and blunt busyness.  
Crowded and old, sometimes smelly, it brought truth to a dream or two  
with all of its charm and profound treasures,  
just like every other big city, and yet so very different.

Crowded and old, mostly smelly, it gave me a dream or two  
as I stumbled down the dirty Paris street,  
seeing every other big city, all so very different,  
and searching for places upon places to leave part of myself.

## THOUGHTS OF PARIS SHAY ATKINS



**UNTITLED**  
COREY BREITLING

# PATHWAY LARRIE KING

from "A Lesson In Flight"

No one ever told me that I had to walk down that hallway everyday. No one ever told me what to say, or how to react to all of them. They hurtled words at me that I didn't understand, but I knew exactly what they meant. I should have been appalled that I, a sixth grader, did not have the same understanding of what was good and what was bad that my peers seemed to have. Perhaps I should have been thankful that they meant to show me the right way to dress and act, and the right things to say. How silly of me.

The classes for my grade were divided into two hallways that met at a ninety-degree angle. The worn linoleum tiles shouted up the regrets of thousands of students that had traversed them. It was an old school, and the antiquity of its methods and materials showed through the thinning veneer of 1996. I loved my school. It was a wonderland of books and art, in stark contrast to my home, which was dark, dusty, and ugly.

The students that arrived to school by bus usually got there early. We were expected by the administration to sit next to our respective classes in those ninety-degree hallways until our teachers arrived. This created two long torturous pathways, lined with anxious students. The path was just wide enough for a single person to walk down and find a seat on the wall. If you arrived early, you could avoid most of the students, have your seat, and wait peacefully. If you arrived later, you had the joy of greeting all of your friends on the path.

If you arrived after that, and if you were me, you were treated to an agonizing journey.



My family was grasping for money in every direction. We had nothing, aside from the house we slept in, and an occasional box of groceries from the church. Our budget didn't leave much room for clothing. My overprotective mother would still pick which clothes I would wear to school. It seemed odd to me then—I longed to take care of myself. It seems more odd now, looking back. Without the money for the things I wanted to wear, I was left at the mercy of whatever was available, which included hand-me-downs from church friends, school friends, and my own mother. I would sometimes be doomed to wear a giant, stretched out T-shirt and biker shorts because it was all we had. Clothing that didn't fit, things that were too large, too tight, strange colors—these were not exactly welcomed by the hallway of agony. The students laughed, pointed, giggled, became angry, or almost always silent...and none of them knew a thing about me. I endured this assault on my family, my status, and my confidence every single day of school for the entire year.

I didn't know what gay meant in 1996. I knew that I would have the occasional crush on a fellow student, and that most of the time that student would be another boy. I had known *that* since kindergarten. I didn't really know what that meant for everyone else. I kept it to myself—what was there to explain? However, it seemed that most kids my age had already received an extensive education on the subject, and made sure to point out a “potential” whenever appropriate. It seemed to be appropriate *whenever*—especially during my walks to class at 7:45 a.m. down a silent, pregnant hallway.

It's a good thing that most sixth graders are resilient. It's unfortunate that I wasn't.







## TO AN EARTHEN MASTERWORK

ANNA RAYE JENNINGS

Come, walk at my side.  
Leave behind these deadline-driven hours.  
The late-night grinding tedium of your studies  
I shall swab from your mind like chalk-dust.  
Lay aside your umbrella;  
The September rain shall not harm us.  
Its frail winds strain to stroke our faces  
That survey the drenched cityscape smeared  
As a ruined charcoal sketch in blurred grey tones.  
Rain, like someone's downcast love story,  
Spills from gutters onto blacktop.  
Strikes the sentry-like streetlamps.  
At my side, you in your soaked shirt.  
Leaning against the cool wrought iron post  
Of a shop's overhanging.  
Entranced,  
Your gaze drawn beyond sloshing cars.  
Dare I intrude?  
Farther we might proceed  
Until the city recedes behind us.  
A dim, violet dusk.  
Blue streaks of clouds etched into the west.  
Ancient oaks stand silhouetted darkly  
Against an expanse fragranced with damp soil and  
grass  
Beneath which  
Lie those entwined in massive roots.  
Forgotten. Indistinguishable  
From the earth surrounding.  
Animate before acorns became these trees,

One wonders where they found themselves.  
And do you remain?  
I reach skyward to a void of dark mystery  
Whose myriad fragments of stellar inferno  
Beg the question, Why?  
For those which ended distanced  
From us by light years, dead trails of brightness  
Trace paths to where they once burned.  
All of it tragic and sublime

As humanity's flicker.  
Observe this handful of grass,  
Your own hands, these details.  
Your frailty realized,  
Perceive the vast ingenuity of this cosmos  
And the unembodied mind from whence it came,  
Self-contained and beautifully ineffable.  
O Love that conceives all love  
(Wherein all loves terminate)  
Be my own demise,  
As I accept no other end.  
As for you, earthen masterwork,  
These thoughts of mine are yours to keep or to kill.  
All things worthwhile are yours.



# SHALL WE DANCE? RANDALL FREDERICK

My heart breaks into the million little strips of confetti adorning a party I was invited to, but not welcome at, as I stand in the corner watching you watching me and thinking to myself what a delightful time we once had dancing across the floor of the room that divides us, how delightful the feel of your body and breasts against me with nothing but confetti between our whispers and laughter and all those moments that we shared.

But now that confetti bursts, like stardust from the celestial and/or heavens, I know not which, and it's as if everything comes and goes, moving with such determinate slowness that I could so easily step between those pieces of myself to reach out and touch you, to take your hand and run away from this floor upon which we once danced, but your eyes and smile, I know not which, tell me that is not what you want, and pop goes my heart, pop goes those memories, pop goes everything, God damn it, that once was or ever could be of all that we shared, as those bodies between us now swirl and spin, laughing now as they dance, oblivious to everything that once was or ever could be but now is not, for I no longer dance and my steps have retraced themselves with a little jig and indeterminate shuffle to forget that dance we once danced so long ago it seems almost as if it did not happen except for the resounding broken blasts of collected confetti here and there as if timed to a metric scale which you could dance to, those strips strewn across the dance floor, as the smile and laughter fade from off my heart, my visage, my very soul and pop goes the leaves and the twigs and the berries of Arkansas underneath my sole as I grab the coat I once took off so you could wear it when you were cold as I exit with that indeterminate shuffle of mine for some means of escaping the falling stars of the celestial body within the ravages of time, temptation and touch as those still dancing rush to the window, laughing and commenting on how beautiful the falling stars are, not knowing how they glisten and twinkle like strips of confetti inside the room, adorning the party I was invited to but not welcome at.

# ON COFFEE AND DRAGONS

JESSICA F. HARVEY

Not dead. Oh no. They cannot be.  
Thin, elusive, silver vapors  
Rose from the half-written note page  
And made their way to a coffee-  
Drenched brain half-focused on them.  
Those scaly mist creatures at once  
Demanded to be set free to  
Burn their marks on the half-blank sheet  
That stared back at two, brown, droopy,  
Half-closed, sloppily painted lids.  
“Let them go” was not an option.  
Holding on also proved futile.  
The half-real beasts vanished back through  
The caffeine gate from which they came.



## ANOTHER ADDICTION

MARLINDA PRUDEN

Faces smashed intolerably close to one another  
in an interlocking exchange  
make the fizz of pop-rocks shoot through taste buds  
like the sun rays through crystal that smells  
like burnt popcorn (or battery acid)  
In the darkness while faces fade forward  
watching lights dance strong and twinkling  
goosepimples run across flesh, barely glazed  
as thoughts flee to dilated egg-timers twitching and  
tweaking  
bodies adapted in turnstyle rotations  
meld in & out, in & out of one another







**STARK**  
REBECCA EDWARDS

# LAZARUS DAY MATT GUIDO

*Setting: A graveyard at sunrise, an empty plot is surrounded by gravestones.*

*At Rise: silence hangs heavy in the air. A lone bird chirps. Mary enters; she is dressed in black and carrying a single rose. She crosses to the empty plot, kneels before it, and places the rose on top of the earth.*

## Mary

God of spirits and of all flesh, who hast trampled down death and overthrown the Devil, given life to Thy world; give rest to the souls of Thy departed servants in a place of brightness... a place of refreshment, a place of repose, where all sickness and sorrow have fled away. Pardon every transgression which they have committed. For Thou art a good God and lovest mankind.

*(Lenny enters.)*

## Mary

Thy righteousness is to all eternity, and Thy word is truth.

*(Silence. Mary rises and begins to leave.)*

**Lenny**

Amen. You, um, you left out the best part.

**Mary** *(Her back is still turned to Lenny)*

Excuse me?

**Lenny**

For Thou only art without sin, because there is no man who lives yet does not sin. Maybe it's not the best part, but it's the truest.

*(Silence)*

How are you, kiddo?

**Mary**

Oh my God... I, um, I'm fine—I guess. What, what are you doing here?

**Lenny**

I could ask the same of you. I, ah, enjoyed the prayer. I haven't heard it since YaYa passed. Seems a little strange to mourn the living, though.

**Mary**

If you acted like the living I wouldn't have to mourn you.

*(Silence)*

Come home.

**Lenny**

You look... good, black isn't really your color, though. I almost left when I saw you here, but—

**Mary**

Why are you here? Shouldn't you be... doing whatever it is you do now?

**Lenny**

Yeah, I probably should, but... well, sometimes I come here to... think.

**Mary**

Think about what?

*(Silence)*

**Mary**

Think about what, Lenny? Talk to me. I... I want to help you.

**Lenny**

Nothing...

**Mary**

Why can't I help? This isn't fair. You're not supposed to be dead. You're not dead. Do you have any idea what this is doing to Mom? Has that thought even crossed your mind? You didn't see her when they came, when that clerk came to the door with the letter. Killed in action, he said. We thank you for you son's valiant sacrifice in the service of his country. She cried all night... we all did.

*(Silence)*

**Lenny**

I'm... sorry.

**Mary**

No, you're not. You might be a lot of things, Leonard, but you're not sorry. You can't be. If you were sorry you would get in the car right now and come home with me.

**Lenny**

I said I can't....

**Mary**

Why not!? You're a miracle, Leonard. You were dead, and then you came back to life. Don't waste it.

**Lenny**

Waste it? If there's anything I do know about it's wasted life. You don't understand. You can't. You haven't seen it, lived it. You weren't over there! You have no idea what it's like to be touched by death. How it invades you; sickens your soul.

**Mary**

Tell me then, talk to me, talk to somebody. Make me understand; we want you back. Please. You're not alone, Leonard.

*(Silence)*

**Lenny**

We are all alone.

*(Silence)*

**Mary**

When did you get so selfish? This is not my brother. My



brother would do anything for his family. My brother would--

**Lenny**

That's not who I am anymore.

**Mary**

Who are you then?

**Lenny**

I... I don't know. I know who I'm not. I'm not who I used to be... It changes you. No one asked me! This isn't what I wanted! I was ready. I made my peace. Four days I laid there bleeding in the desert—begging Him to take me—to embrace me in His loving arms and carry me home. He just spit me back out into this hell... I remember pain, pain beyond belief... pain that would never end. Then came the screaming, me... the doctors... the nurses—everyone screaming.

*(Silence)*

Lazarus phenomenon, they called it. Not miracle. There's no such thing as miracles, just scientific phenomena. I'm not a normal person anymore, Mare. I will never be a normal person again. I can't be.

**Mary**

When did you get so selfish? This is a gift from God, Lenny. He chose you. He could have picked anyone, but he didn't. He picked you. You're special.

**Lenny**

No, I'm not. I'm ruined. You should go.

**Mary**

For God's sake, Lenny, stop this!

**Lenny**

You don't understand, Mary. There is no God. I hate to break the news to you, kiddo, but... I was there. No light, no angels, no pearly gates, no Saint fucking Peter, and certainly no God. Just blackness, empty darkness ringing with silence. You can't know what--

**Mary**

Stop It! Stop saying that. You're the one who doesn't know! The worst part was when they came back. Wonderful news, he said. Your brother isn't dead. Sorry for your grief, but we're sending him back... We were going to have a party for you, with the whole family, a joyous festival for our Lazarus.

*(Silence)*

It was a miracle.

*(Silence)*

Then you never came. She crumbled a little each day waiting. Three years now and she's still waiting, you know... we, well, we all are.

**Lenny**

I don't think you should come here anymore.

**Mary**

No, I don't think you should come here anymore.

**Lenny**

Leave me alone.

**Mary**

I can't... Come with me.

**Lenny**

I....

**Mary**

Please!

**Lenny** *(softly)*

Can't.

*(Lenny shakes his head and exits slowly. Mary begins to cry. She slowly returns to the grave site and kneels again.)*

**Mary**

O God bless Thy servant. For Thou are the Resurrection, the Life, and the Repose of Thy servants who have fallen asleep, O Christ our God, and unto Thee we ascribe glory, together with Thy Father, who is from everlasting, and Thine all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and ever unto ages of ages.

*(She begins to exit, but pauses.)*

**Mary**

I love you, big brother. Come home to us. Amen.

*(Exit Mary. A crow is heard in the distance. Lights out.)*



**TO THE HONORABLE**  
**TERANDA DONATTO**

# TO DIE FOR AN IDEA: A VILLANELLE

ANNA RAYE JENNINGS

Where frailty lives with dignity  
In prison cells devoid of light  
The highest of humanity

Recall a time when they were free.  
Imagination takes its flight  
Where frailty lives with dignity.

To minds constrained by tyranny  
Belief is still a sacred right.  
The highest of humanity

Can grasp this concept more than we.  
In chambers hidden from our sight  
Where frailty lives with dignity

Their prayers become a symphony  
They sing for their oncoming night.  
The highest of humanity

In wretchedness and agony  
Longsuffering and strength unite  
Where frailty lives with dignity:  
The highest of humanity.







The Arts and Science Building  
Too cold or too hot, never just right  
Smelled like an old sweat sock  
Kept in a closed locker

He stood carelessly, rail thin  
Jeans like old blue paint  
Sandals even in winter  
Hair in a loose ponytail  
Walrus facial hair, untamed

(Mom, at least it's clean)

Young heart, young legs  
And Atticus Finch Dreams  
Dreams of being real

Kyser Hall once again  
Too hot, too cold, never just right  
Smells like an old sweat sock  
Kept in a closed locker

He stands on teacher tired feet  
Despite the soft walking shoes  
Elastic waist slacks  
That he swore he'd never wear  
Silvering hair, bared close to the face

(Honey it's too gray if I wear it longer)

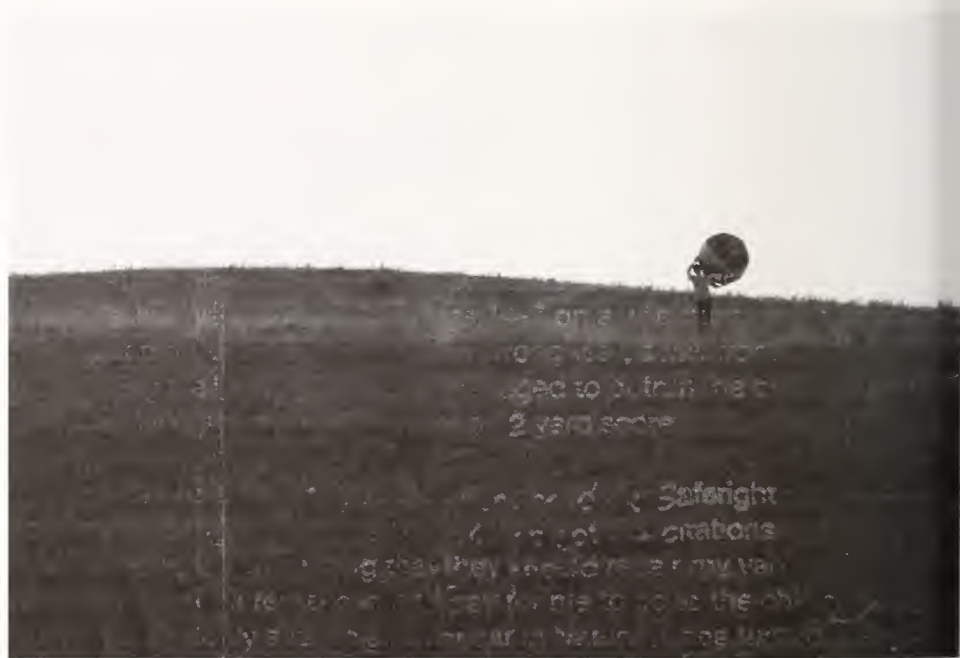
Bruised heart, bruised legs  
Teacher of the Year Dreams  
Dreams of being real

ROBERT LANE

**A & S KYSER (BUILDING 81)**

# BEARING THEIR BURDENS

SARAH HUNT



# WITH GRATITUDE FOR ZAFON

## MICHELLE ARENDT

With yellowed, brittle pages and its broken spine  
Saturated with must and the stale scent of neglect,  
The shelved book rests fulfilling stages of decline.  
Thickly coated with dust that took years to collect.  
Characters that once danced through readers' minds  
In quaint little towns surrounded by green lands  
Are now quite immobile, statically enshrined  
Inhabiting desolate cities where time is banned  
Its home a used bookstore, its value diminished  
Dishonors the first owner that saved until owned.  
Its plot no longer valid and characters finished  
But never to its author that labored until honed.  
Words that once inspired, interested, and intrigued  
Lie on the pages forgotten, fragile, and fatigued.





Argus office



